

**SOUTHERN CAMEROONIANS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS 1922-1961: RESISTANCE
TO POLITICAL DOMINATION**

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ABSTRACT

The British administrative policy in Africa and Cameroon in particular was generally guided by selfish political, economic and social motives. This informed their decision to administer the British portion of Cameroon as an integral part of the Nigerian colony. This act was to completely change the course of History of the Southern Cameroons territory from 1922 to 1961. From this basic premise, this paper argues that the administration of British Southern Cameroons as an integral part of the British Nigerian Colony exposed the territory to the reality of political domination. This resulted from the various constitutional changes that occurred and the fact that most of the administrators in British Southern Cameroons as well as Nigeria were mostly Nigerians to the almost total neglect of the Southern Cameroonians. As such, Southern Cameroonians formed political pressure groups, parties and wrote petitions to the British Government as well as the United Nations to complain about attempts to dominate them politically within Nigeria. As a cutting-edge measure, the Southern Cameroonians took advantage of the 1961 plebiscite to vote massively against integration within Nigeria. This was not only because they were charmed by Foncha's campaigns, but it was also in reaction and the wish to put an end to political domination within Nigeria.

Keywords: *Southern Cameroons, Southern Cameroonians, Nigeria, Politics, Political domination, Resistance, Integral part, British Nigerian Colony.*

Introduction

It is an established fact that through history people all over the world have always taken any form of domination with reservation. In most cases, attempts to dominate a people are usually violently resisted. This was the case with the German annexation of Cameroon when some indigenous groups out rightly resisted German annexation of their territory in 1884. Among these groups were the Nso, Bangwa, Bakweri, Duala and the Ewondo. These groups were guided by

the siege mentality to protect the cherished sovereignty of their traditional institutions and authorities.¹ As such, colonialism was, for the most part imposed on the people against their wishes. This explains the unfavourable reactions and violence (from some coastal indigenous groups) that greeted the German annexation of Cameroon (Fanso, 2017:155-157). Even groups like Bali, Bamum, and Ewondo that later collaborated with the Germans either initially resisted or were coerced in one way or the other to submit to the German authority in Cameroon which lasted from July 1884 to February 1916. After the fall of German *Kamerun*, the territory came under the direct tutelage of the League of Nations which in turn surrendered its control to Britain and France as Mandatory powers.² Both powers experimented the Condominium which failed and thus Britain and France decided to partition the territory. In the course of the partition, Britain and France acquired 1/5 (20%) and 4/5 (80%) respectively (Ndi, 2013:74-76). The territory taken by Britain was not only small in terms of surface area but was also narrow (elongated), non-contiguous (separated) and marred by transports and communication difficulties which made its effective administration as a single and separate entity from Nigeria nightmarish (Ngoh, 2001:3). In spite of this, the British deliberately decided to administer Southern Cameroons as a part of Southern and later Eastern Regions of Nigeria.

This paper maintains that the administration of Southern Cameroons as an integral part of Nigeria saw the latter trying to politically dominate the former. But, Southern Cameroonians in the Nigerian political arena resisted all forms of political domination during the period of their appurtenance. This was because though they were administered as part of Nigeria, they refused complete integration and saw themselves as a different identity which they wished to maintain. Attempts by the Nigerians to politically dominate the Southern Cameroons both in Nigeria and in the Southern Cameroons territory took many forms. The features of some Nigerian constitutions like the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Richards Constitution of 1946, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 showed signs of either political domination or absorption of the Southern Cameroons territory (Ibid:11-58). Besides, Southern Cameroonians were underrepresented in the Legislative and Executive Councils of Nigeria. However, in an austerely and gentlemanly manner, the Southern Cameroonian politicians through political pressure groups, political parties and parliamentary

discourse resisted domination. Ultimately, in 1961, their massive vote against integration within the Nigerian Federation was partly informed by the desire to steer clear from Nigerian politics—a sure way of escaping political domination.

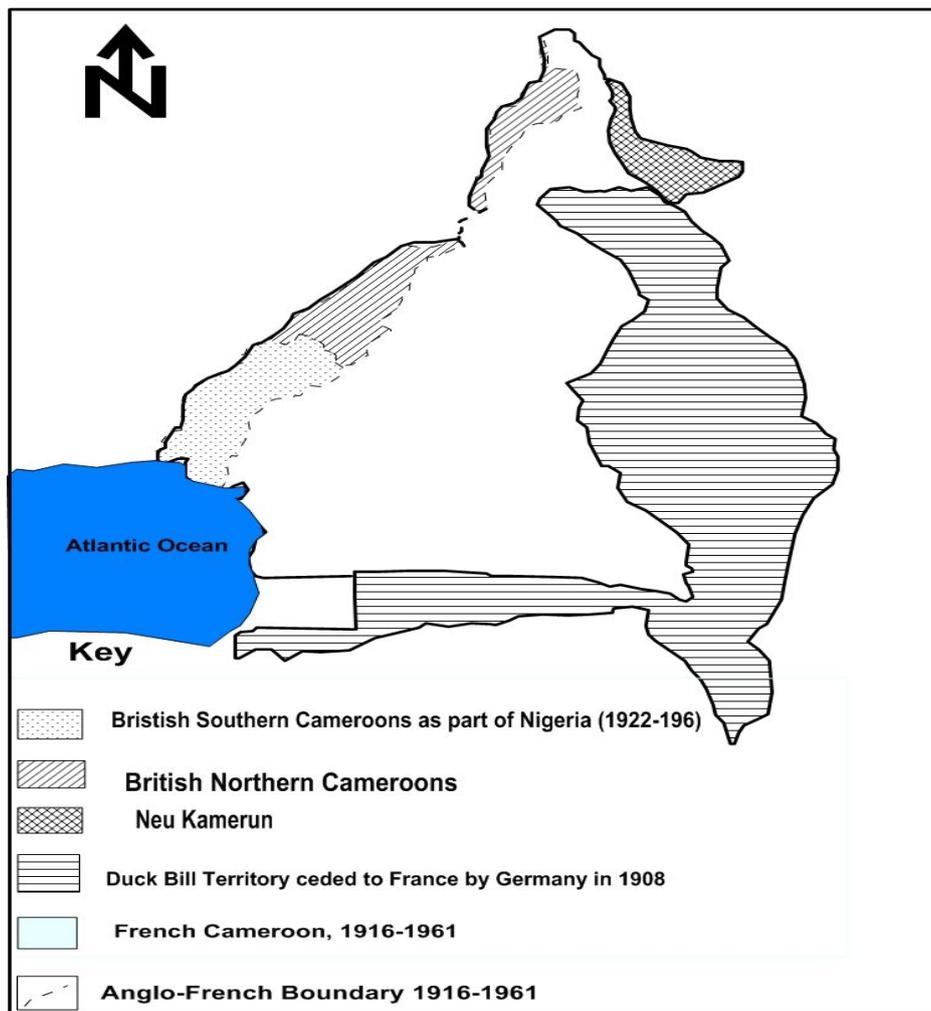
British Southern Cameroons between the period 1922 and 1961 has animated a great deal of scholarly discourse in Cameroon and beyond. Many scholars have handled different aspects of the Southern Cameroons-Nigerian political intercourse. George Atem (1984) discusses with lucidity the symbiotic connect that existed between Cameroon and Nigeria from 1884 to 1961. His study touches on the political, economic and social dimensions of the interaction between the two states. In his administrative memoirs in British Africa, Malcolm Milne (1999) unveils with astonishing depth the constitutional and personality problems that were associated with the emergence of Southern Cameroons as a self-governing entity and its ultimate reunification with the Republic of Cameroon. Ndi (2013) demonstrates the distinct political culture of the Southern Cameroons politicians during the period of political tensions over the choice on the nature of their independence. In spite of the different shades of opinions between those who wanted the territory to remain part of Nigeria, those who wanted Reunification with French Cameroon and those who wanted outright independence, the Southern Cameroons politicians demonstrated maturity in handling the differences. The Southern Cameroons Constitutional History between 1922 and 1961 has been handled by Ngoh (2001) with particular attention on the impact of the Nigerian Constitutions on Southern Cameroons while Bongfen Chem-Langhee (2004) maintains that though Southern Cameroons was administered as part of Nigeria, they opted for the maintenance of their distinct identity. On his part, Nfi (2014a) demonstrates how the Southern Cameroons interaction with Nigeria led to attempts by the Nigerians to *Nigerianise* the Southern Cameroons economy, civil service, judiciary and education. In another argument, (Nfi, 2014b) he maintains that the reunification debate in the Southern Cameroons opened the way for the French Cameroon immigrants to interfere in Southern Cameroons politics and to ultimately influence the plebiscite results in favour of French Cameroon. Lastly, Aka (2002) in another dimension of study on this territory within the same period traces the underdevelopment of Southern Cameroons to the British administration in the territory which, invariably was a result of the administration of Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria. Thus, much ink has flown in the

academia on the Southern Cameroons question. Though different aspects of the territory's interaction with Nigeria has been handled, the present study is distinct in that it gives insights on attempts to dominate the Southern Cameroonians and the strategies they employed to resist any forms of political domination.

British Southern Cameroons: Bases of Association with Nigeria

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 saw Britain and France shelving their longstanding colonial rivalries to put up a united front against Germany in her African colonies (Elango, 1987: 7). In this way, they formed the West African Expeditionary Force (WAEF) which toppled the German government in Douala and led to the implantation of the condominium as a provisional measure while reflecting on the administration of the territory when Germany would have been completely defeated (Ndi:74-76). However, due to a number of considerations, the condominium proved abortive and thus was replaced by the desire of both parties to partition the territory. These considerations included among others the financial, authority, succession and territorial issues over which the British and the French failed to agree. Thus, while there was disagreement over the condominium, there was a fair consensus over the partition of the territory by the same powers. It thus followed that, the Picot Line gave 432,000km² (4/5) to France and 88,000km² (1/5) to Britain but this unequal partition was never disputed even by Britain (Eyongetah et al, 1974:79). Meanwhile, Britain had controlled Nigeria following colonization that began as far back as 1861 after the acquisition of the Lagos Colony (Onwubiko, 1972:254). France on her part occupied territories to the eastern border of German *Kamerun* in what became known as French Equatorial Africa. (see **Map**).

German *Kamerun* by 1914



Source: Adapted from T. Eyongetah et al, *A History of the Cameroon*, New Edition (UK: Longman Group Limited, 1974), 80.

The interests of these two powers in Cameroon could be understood and hinged on the desire to build great colonial empires in Africa. Thus, since the unequal partition gave the two powers territories adjacent to their colonies, they both considered the partition to be consensual. As a result, both parties agreed to and welcomed the partition as it was though the general feeling

among Cameroonians was that of dissatisfaction against the partition of their territory. Sultan Njoya of the Bamum Kingdom for instance was one of those who resisted the partition especially the fact that his Kingdom fell under the French tutelage (Ngoh, 1988:82-84). The partition of Cameroon was thus a thorny issue that brought difficulties and misery on the people of the territory (Mukete, 2013:33-36). Thus the resistance to political domination within Nigerian politics by Southern Cameroonians was an extension of the same spirit of resistance to the partition of their territory.

Britain gained territories lying adjacent to her Nigerian colony while France acquired a large territory adjoining her colonies in French Equatorial Africa. As a deliberate measure, the British chose to administer the British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons as separate parts of the Northern Nigerian Provinces of Benue, Bornu and Adamawa and the Southern (and later, Eastern) Province of Nigeria respectively. This decision was not taken with the consent of either the Nigerians or the Cameroonians. Thus, some Nigerians notably, members of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and some Cameroonians did not approve of the idea (Ngoh, 2001). A number of considerations informed the British decision to administratively link her Cameroon portion to Nigeria. In the first place, Britain (after much reluctance) ended up acquiring these portions of Cameroon mainly for strategic reasons. Administering her portion of the Cameroons as an integral part of Nigeria was a strategic move taken by the British administration to tidy her Eastern Nigerian Boundary with the Cameroons (Rubin, 1971:71). In a memorandum on May 29, 1919, Alfred Milner, the British Secretary of State for Colonies argued that; "The territory we have gained, though not large in extent, has a certain value in giving us better boundaries and bringing completely within our borders native tribes which have hitherto been partly within British territory and partly outside it" (Gardinier, 1967:523 Quoted in Ngoh, 2001:4). An example of such territories that Britain needed to have its boundaries tidied was Yola. Having acquired the territory whose primary purpose was to use for tidying her border, administering it as part of Nigeria became a natural turn.

Another factor that imposed on Britain the necessity to connect her Cameroonian territory to the Nigerian colony was her initial unwillingness to acquire any part of the territory after the First World War (Rothwell, 1971: 73 cited in Ngoh, 2001:3). Ostensibly, the British lukewarm attitude

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

The foregoing arguments lucidly demonstrate that it was the British deliberate decision to administer Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria.Britain thus took advantage of the leverage given by Article Nine (9) of the Mandate Provision to administer Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria.³The association of British Cameroons in general and British Southern Cameroons in particular to the British Nigerian colony which lasted for close to forty(40) years left indelible imprints on the Southern Cameroons territory and greatly shaped the political evolution of that political unit called Southern Cameroons. During this period of appurtenance with Nigeria, Southern Cameroonians generally demonstrated their unwillingness to be fully integrated within Nigeria politically in spite of their political attachment to the latter.

Southern Cameroons-Nigeria Appurtenance: Administrative Arrangement

The administrative system in British Cameroons as from 1922 was based on the policy of Indirect Rule. In fact, before 1922, it was not certain which administrative policy should be used in British Cameroons (Fanso, 2017: 236). After the partition, the Governor-General of Nigeria, Lord Frederick Lugard ordered that “the British Cameroons be administered according to the Laws of *Kamerun* so far as these were known, or according to the laws of the part of Nigeria in which the administering officer had previously held his appointment” (Ibid). Eventually, what was been applied in British Cameroons were the laws of Northern or Southern Nigeria. This situation remained like that until July 20, 1922 when the British administration in the territory officially began (Ibid). Meanwhile, by April 1922, the Secretary of State for Colonies had

approved the use of Indirect Rule in the British Cameroons territory as the administrative policy. This policy was preferred because it was financially cost-effective to the British who were not willing to shoulder an extra financial burden in the administration of overseas territories and so wanted the colonies to pay for the cost of their administration (Kilson, 1970:74).

According to Coleman (1958), Indirect Rule refers to; “a system of local administration in which the essential features were the preservation of traditional political institutions and their adaptation under the tutelage and direction of the British administration to the requirements of modern units of local government”. On his part, Onwubiko defines Indirect Rule as a system of administration under which traditional rulers were allowed to rule their people under the supervision of British officials (Onwubiko, 1972). In this way, the British recognized the indigenous administrations and the organized chiefs were officially styled Native Authorities or Native Administrations (NAs). Through the NAs, the British administered the local people by passing down orders through them and receiving feedback from the natives through the traditional rulers. Thus, the traditional rulers acted as administrative intermediaries in the system of administration.

The British portion of Cameroon was divided into two parts. These included British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons. The Northern Half adjoining Northern Nigeria was administered as an integral part of the three Northern Nigerian provinces. The Tigon-Ndoro-Kentu area became part of the Benue Province with capital in Maiduguri; the Northern and Southern Adamawa Districts formed part of Adamawa Province with capital; at Yola while Dikwa Division became part of Bornu Province with capital at Makurdi (Eyongetah et al, 1974:81). This connection was largely because the British authorities to a certain degree regarded the British Northern Cameroons territory as an extension of Northern Nigeria and as part of the Fulani-dominated Northern Nigeria (Ngoh, 1988:4). Southern Cameroons was not split in the same manner as the Northern Cameroons. It was initially administered as an additional province within the Southern Provinces of Nigeria and later, it became part of Eastern Nigeria, still as a separate province (Eyongetah et al, 81). The administration of the Southern Cameroons as a single entity perhaps accounted in part to instilling in the people the feeling of oneness and the ability to preserve their inherited culture which has determined the evolution of

the present-day North West and South West Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. Southern Cameroons was divided into four Divisions including Victoria, Mamfe, Kumba and Bamenda and later on, the Bamenda Division was further split into three including Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe (Ngoh, 1988: 4). This brought up the number of Divisions in Southern Cameroons to Six placed under two Provinces. These included the Bamenda Province (Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe Divisions) and the Cameroons Province (Victoria, Kumba and Mamfe Divisions) (Ibid).

The ultimate authority in administration of the Nigerian Colony and the mandated territory of Cameroon was the Governor-General who resided in Lagos (Fanso, 2017: 236). Under the Governor-General were two Lieutenant-Governors who were in charge of the Northern and Southern Cameroons groups of Provinces while the Resident was the principal Executive Officer of the Cameroons Province and was based in Buea (Ibid: 237-238). The District Officers (DOs) headed the Divisions and were assisted by the Assistant District Officers. Under them were the Traditional Rulers who served as District Heads. The system of administration was thus hierarchical and highly organized especially with the putting in place of the Indirect Rule system of administration. By this arrangement, Southern Cameroons was linked to Nigeria constitutionally, administratively, and legislatively. It thus followed that constitutional, administrative, judicial and legislative changes in Nigeria invariably affected the Southern Cameroons territory. For the most part however, such changes were either consciously or unconsciously designed to enable Nigeria dominate Southern Cameroons politically.

Evidence of political domination of Southern Cameroons within Nigerian

The manner in which the administrative system was structured linked up Nigeria and Southern Cameroons constitutionally, administratively, and legislatively. Since constitutional, administrative, and legislative changes in Nigeria invariably affected the Southern Cameroons, it followed that some of such changes were regarded by Southern Cameroonians as unfair and designed to dominate them politically. Evidence of political domination of British Southern Cameroons began to be seen as far back as 1922 with the passage of the Clifford Constitution by Sir Hugh Clifford. This constitution abolished the old Nigerian Council and put in its place Legislative Council of Forty-six (46) members. This constitution also created an Executive

Council which was more or less an advisory body to the Governor (Ngoh, 2001: 10). The passage of the Clifford Constitution coincided with the official commencement of the British Mandate in Southern Cameroons. But the Constitution apparently ignored the need for Southern Cameroons to be represented in the Legislative and the Executive Councils. As such, in spite of the creation of the Legislative and Executive Councils, Southern Cameroons was never being represented there in. This situation was regarded by Southern Cameroonians as an attempt to politically dominate and/or marginalise them since between 1922 and 1942 and between 1922 and 1951, they had no representation in the Legislative and Executive Councils that existed in Lagos, Nigeria respectively.

In 1946, the Richards constitution that replaced the Clifford Constitution also showed evidence of legislative marginalisation of Southern Cameroons by the Nigerians. Sir Arthur Richards passed the Richards Constitution which further strengthened the attempts to fully integrate the Southern Cameroons into the Nigerian Colony. This Constitution divided Nigeria into the Northern, Eastern and Western Regions.⁴ Southern Cameroons formed part of the Eastern Region with Capital at Enugu. While the central Legislative Council remained in Lagos, Regional Assemblies were created in the three regions, respectively. Southern Cameroons was given two Native Authority Seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly. These Seats were occupied by Chief Manga Williams of Victoria and Fon Galega II of Bali. This constitution like the Clifford Constitution showed traces of attempts to completely integrate Southern Cameroons into the British Nigerian colony. Apart from introducing unwelcomed constitutions, the British and the Nigerians also made efforts to *Nigerianise* the Southern Cameroons administration.

The Southern Cameroons territory also witnessed an influx of Nigerian as administrators into the territory. As early as 1923, different Southern Cameroons government departments including post and telegraphs, police, prisons, agriculture, medical, education, customs, marine, and the public works were dominated by Nigerians (Nfi, 2014a:33). Nigerians occupied most of the top administrative offices in Southern Cameroons. By the 1940s, the first African Assistant District Officer for Manyu Division (in Southern Cameroons) was a Nigerian (Ibid). The British blamed the non-appointment of Southern Cameroonians to top administrative positions between the 1920s and the 1940s on the claims that Nigerians were already acculturated with the British

imperial system and the English language than their counterparts in Southern Cameroons (Fanso, 1982:475 cited in Nfi, 2014:33). Interestingly, most of these Nigerians on which the British depended for the administration of Southern Cameroons were far less qualified and could not “deliver the goods” (Ibid). This left the Southern Cameroons with the feelings of political domination by their Nigerian counterparts and led to the emergence of widespread resistance and criticisms against the system instituted by the British. This resistance manifested in the form of political pressure groups, political parties and through petitions and elections.

Resistance to political domination: Through political pressure groups

The feeling of political domination by the Southern Cameroonian politicians bore with it the seeds of political pressure groups in the territory. One of the swiftest responses to the apparent attempts to political domination within Nigerian politics was found in the formation of the first ever political pressure in Southern Cameroons, the Cameroon Welfare Union (CWU). The CWU was created in 1939 by G.J. Mbene in Victoria. Among its objectives was that of “[...]catering for the interests of Cameroonians which, at this point, included the assertion of a Cameroons identity [...]” (Chem-Langhee, 2004:24). The question of the Southern Cameroons identity remained strong in the minds of the people throughout the period of their association with Nigeria. This invariably was the motivation for the determination by the Southern Cameroonians to resist all forms of political domination within Nigeria. Consequently, in early 1940, the CWU petitioned the British administration against the non-representation of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Lagos (Ibid). This move, though delayed for two more years eventually led to the appointment of Chief Manga Williams in 1942 as the Southern Cameroons representative in the Legislative Council in Lagos after the demise of the CWU.

The death of the CWU necessitated the birth of another political pressure group, the Cameroon Youth League (CYL). It was founded on March 27, 1940 in Lagos and was led by Southern Cameroonians undergoing education in Nigerian Schools and Colleges. These included Paul M. Kale, Emmanuel M.L. Endeley and John N. Foncha. Though it had many objectives, its ultimate purpose was to seek a recognized status for Southern Cameroons but this had to be achieved through the attainment of a separate legislature for Southern Cameroons (Ibid:25). The creation

of the CYL was thus another landmark move by the Southern Cameroonians to maintain their cherished identity and shield themselves against all arrows of domination from their Nigerian counterparts. In fact, it was the increase pressure of the CYL that eventually led to the appointment of Chief Manga Williams as the Southern Cameroons representative to the Legislative Council in Lagos. It also led to the enfranchisement of the Southern Cameroons in Nigeria. In reaction to the obnoxious terms of the Richards Constitution passed in 1946, another political pressure group emerged in Southern Cameroons under the leadership of EML Endeley. This was known as the Cameroon Federal Union (CFU) founded in 1947 in Southern Cameroons. This pressure group canvassed for the re-enfranchisement of the Southern Cameroons and the creation of a Separate Southern Cameroons Region (Rubin, 1971:84 cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004:27).The Richards Constitution had led to Southern Cameroons losing its seat in the Legislative Council in Lagos and being granted only two Native Authority seats in the Eastern Regional Assembly.

In May 1949, yet another political pressure group was created in Southern Cameroons called the Cameroon National Federation (CNF) and led by EML Endeley. This group demanded among other things a separate Cameroons region and House of Assembly under a Commissioner responsible to the Trusteeship Council. Beyond this, it also advocated for unification and reunification of the Cameroons (Ibid:29). While in Nigeria therefore, the Southern Cameroonians maintained their identity and ensured that any form of domination within the Nigerian political system was resisted. Ultimately, by 1951, Southern Cameroons identity and the feeling of oneness was even more overwhelming that the desire to be restored to the unity of the territory as it was under German administration could not be contained. This led to the emergence of the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) as a political pressure group that was aimed at forging the political unity of the Cameroons as it was under German rule-reason for which it adopted the German spelling “Kamerun”. All these were to prove that though Southern Cameroons formed part of Nigeria, it refused to be fully integrated into Nigeria. It maintained its identity by steadfastly identifying and resisting any possible form of political domination through the formation of political pressure groups. Another resistance tool used by the Southern Cameroonians against political domination was the formation of political parties.

Through political parties

Against the backdrop of political domination within Nigerian politics, Southern Cameroons resorted to militancy in Nigerian parties and the formation of indigenous political parties. Political activism had actually begun in the territory in association with Nigeria. Southern Cameroonians such as Kale and Endeley were instrumental in the formation of political parties like the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) founded in 1940 under the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Through this party, the Southern Cameroons position against the Richards Constitution was heralded. This political party organized public demonstrations against the new constitution proposed by Sir Arthur Richards (Ibid:26). Though the NCNC was not led by *bonafide* Southern Cameroonians, members of this community militated in the party and used it as a shield against political domination within the Nigerian system. This was more so because the political party shared in some of the grievances of the Southern Cameroonians. A case in point was the resistance put up by the NCNC against the Richards Constitution.

In fact, in 1946, the NCNC toured the nooks and crannies of Nigeria and Southern Cameroons to galvanise popular moral and financial support to undertake a trip to London in opposition against the Richards Constitution. As a result, in June 1947, a seven-man delegation including PM Kale of Southern Cameroons, undertook a trip to London to present their case against the Richards Constitution (Ibid:27). This gave Kale the opportunity to present the Southern Cameroons case against the Constitution while requesting the restoration of the Southern Cameroons Seat in the Legislative Council in Lagos and the creation of a separate legislature for the territory. Thus, in their militancy in the NCNC, the Southern Cameroonians never lost sight of the necessity to use the party led by Nigerians against political domination by Nigerians. However, this party besides being used to drum up sympathy against political domination, it offered them political apprenticeship which was required in the running of indigenous political parties which began operating in the territory in 1953.

The opposition against the Richards Constitution led to the introduction of a new constitution in 1951 by Sir John Macpherson who had replaced Sir Arthur Richard as Governor-General. The Macpherson Constitution granted the Southern Cameroons territory Thirteen (13) Seats in the

Eastern Regional Assembly and Four (4) Seats in the Legislative Council in Lagos. Besides, the territory was also being represented in the Executive Council of the Eastern Region and the Central Executive Council in Lagos by S.T. Muna (Minister of Works) and EML Endeley (Minister of Labour) respectively (Ngoh, 2001: 59-62). The Macpherson Constitution though addressed some of the issues created by the Richards Constitution was still regarded by the Southern Cameroonians with contempt because it failed to grant a separate legislature. On the contrary, the Constitution reinforced the Southern Cameroons-Nigerian connection at a time when the Southern Cameroonians were shifting towards increasing demands for a separate legislature for the territory. As the Southern Cameroonians contemplated on what possible steps could be taken to ensure that the territory gained a separate legislature, a “disguised opportunity” came—the Eastern Regional Crisis, April 1953.

The eruption of constitutional and personality conflicts between top brass of the NCNC in the Eastern Regional Assembly, notably, Chairman, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Vice Chairman Professor Eyo Ita saw the Southern Cameroons Delegation being victimised. In the course of the conflict, the lone Southern Cameroonian Minister to the Eastern Regional Council of Ministers, ST Muna (Minister of Works) was dismissed. In reaction, Nine (9) of the Thirteen (13) Southern Cameroonian representatives to the Eastern Regional Assembly formed the Benevolent Neutrality Bloc (BNB) which called on the Southern Cameroons to steer clear from Nigerian politics (Ibid:67-74). Their reasons for expressing the wish to sever links with Nigeria were that there was “a deliberate disregard of the wishes and aspirations of the Southern Cameroons” and that within Nigeria, “they were unable to make the wishes of the Cameroons people respected”. After holding the Mamfe Constitutional Conference of May 22-24, 1953, Members of the BNB through several consultations formed the first indigenous political party in British Southern Cameroons, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) led by EML Endeley and RJK Dibongue (Fanso, 2017: 299-300). The aim of the party was to seek a recognised status for Southern Cameroons and eventual Reunification with French Cameroon. By 1954, under the Lyttleton Constitution, Southern Cameroons was granted a Quasi Regional Status with a reasonable degree of autonomy. Dr. EML Endeley became the Leader of Government Business. However, the territory had not fully extricated itself from the Nigerian connection and the possibility of

continuous political domination. Thus the struggle for a Full Region continued until 1957 and by 1961, Southern Cameroons was granted autonomy in union with the Republic of Cameroon. To have gotten to this level, one measure that was seriously exploited by the Southern Cameroonians was the use of petitions.

Through petitions

Southern Cameroonians also used petitions to call the attention of the British and the International Community on possible attempts at political domination of their territory by the Nigerians. These petitions were either addressed by political pressure groups, parties or individuals. In early 1940 for instance, while tension mounted on the non-representation of the Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Lagos, the Victoria Branch of the CWU addressed a petition to the British administration requesting the representation of Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council (Kale, 1967:51-55 cited in Chem-Langhee, 2004:24). As a result of this petition, the British administration granted the request in principles in 1940 and in 1942, it was formally granted with the appointment of Chief Manga Williams as the Southern Cameroons representative in the Legislative Council in Lagos. This act was a clear pointer to the British/Nigerian authorities that the Southern Cameroonians were politically conscious enough to identify signs of political domination or marginalisation.

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

In March 1949, a combined body of various associations and unions of Southern Cameroons in Lagos comprising the Mamfe Improvement Union, the Bakweri Improvement Union, the Bamenda Improvement Association, the CYL and the CNF petitioned Sir John Macpherson, the new Governor for a separate region and the House of Assembly under a Commissioner responsible to the Trusteeship Council (Chem-Langhee:28). It is worth mentioning at this juncture that though Governor Macpherson passed a new Constitution that was apparently intended to improve the political representation of the Southern Cameroons in the Nigerian system, Southern Cameroonians at this point had already tilted their attention towards gaining a separate region from Nigeria. This focused attention dazzled their ability to appreciate the innovations introduced by the Macpherson Constitution which increased the number of their representation from two (2) to thirteen (13) in the Eastern Regional Assembly in Enugu. While the Macpherson Constitution aimed at resolving the issues created by the Richards Constitution, the Southern Cameroonians saw it as an attempt to fully integrate them within Nigeria, a situation that they were already considering with contempt and disdain.

Another petition addressed to the British administration came after the Mamfe Constitutional Conference of May 22-24, 1953 which reiterated the desire of Southern Cameroons for a separate region. This was done in prelude to the London Constitutional Conference that held in July and August 1953 in which Endeley, JC Kangsen and SA George spoke the position of the Benevolent Neutrals. At the end of the Conference, the need for the revision of the Macpherson Constitution became pressing. Sir Oliver Lyttleton later replaced Macpherson as Governor of Nigeria and the Lyttleton Constitution granted the Southern Cameroons a Quasi Regional Status on October 26, 1954 with Endeley as Leader of Government Business. The Quasi Regional Status only granted Southern Cameroons limited autonomy and the struggle for a Full Region had to continue. This was achieved in 1957 and the Plebiscite of 1961 put an end to the close to 40 years long attachment to Nigeria.

Through the 1961 plebiscite

The 1961 plebiscite put a final end to the political appurtenance between the Southern Cameroons and Nigeria which began in 1922. The association of the Southern Cameroons to

Nigeria resulted in some unpleasant outcomes. Apart from the Igbo factor, the British did much to create division among the politicians in order to manipulate them for their ulterior motives. This explains in part why in the 1950s, the Southern Cameroonians were divided between different shades of opinions concerning the nature of their independence. Three of these shades of opinions were easily identifiable. Some Southern Cameroonians believed that their independence should be achieved within the Nigerian Federation. This opinion was championed by Dr. EML Endeley. Another group of politicians in the territory believed in independence as part of French Cameroon. They were led by JN Foncha. Meanwhile PM Kale held that Southern Cameroons should secede from Nigeria without reunifying with French Cameroon. In other words, this group of Southern Cameroonians stood for the independence of Southern Cameroons as a state in its own right. It is worth mentioning that the politicians did not disagree on the question of independence but on the nature of independence.

In the midst of these differences, Southern Cameroonians remained conscious of attempts by the Nigerians to dominate them politically during the close to 40 years of appurtenance. To put to rest these differences, the United Nations decided on the organisation of a plebiscite in the territory on February 11, 1961. The questions were tricky and hinged on the following options;

1- Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Federation of Nigeria? OR

2- Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the Independent Republic of Cameroon?

These questions reflected two of the three main political opinions in the Southern Cameroons, the third and of course the most popular option, that is “Independence without joining” (secession) having been consigned to obscurity/oblivion. By the day of voting, JN Foncha of the KNDP who championed the drive for Reunification with the Republic of Cameroon had succeeded to charm Southern Cameroonians into believing that a vote for reunification was going to be the “better evil”. Thus by a total of **233,571** votes as against **97,741** Southern Cameroonians chose to achieve independence by “being annexed” to *La République du Cameroun* as opposed to the British Northern Cameroonians who by **146,296** votes as against

97,659 chose to be integrated within the Nigerian Federation (Fanso, 2017: 324-326). The overwhelming victory of the Reunification option in Southern Cameroons was indicative of the desire by the people of this territory to sever links with the Nigerians completely and steer clear from continuous attempts to politically dominate them within Nigeria. This was thus the final act by the Southern Cameroonians to lay to final rest the close to 40 years of political attachment to Nigeria characterised by political domination.

Conclusion

The administration of the British Southern Cameroons as part of Nigeria was a deliberate decision of the British. After the First World War in Cameroon, Southern Cameroons was administered as part of the British Nigerian Colony. This introduced the Southern Cameroons territory to the realities of political domination within the Nigerian system. This manifested in the forms of biased constitutions passed by the successive British Governors including Hugh Clifford (1922), Arthur Richards (1946), John Macpherson (1951) and Oliver Lyttleton (1954). Besides the passage of these respective constitutions, Southern Cameroonians were also administratively discriminated against in Nigeria as most of the administrators were Nigerians. Faced with this reality, the Southern Cameroonians through political pressure groups, political parties, petitions and the 1961 plebiscite demonstrated their ability to resist the various forms of political domination. Thus in voting for Reunification in 1961, the Southern Cameroonians were invariably sanctioning the Nigerians for having dominated them politically for close to 40 years. However, the union of the Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon still leaves much to be desired as some complained of marginalisation which eventually resulted to the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon in 2016. This raised the question as to whether the Southern Cameroonians escaped from political domination in Nigeria into marginalization in the union with the Republic of Cameroon.

NOTES

¹ The different communities that existed in what was to become Cameroon were classified into several ethnic groups each of which constituted a cultural unit. These ethnic organizations varied in their political and socio-economic set ups. The highest authority in these communities was their “natural ruler”- the King. The power of the King was supreme and most communities viewed it as such. It was thus difficult for the indigenous people to understand that

the Kaiser of Germany or the Queen of England was greater than their ruler. This explains in part why the people resisted European annexation of their territory.

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

³ This Article permitted Britain to; Have full powers of administration and legislation in the area subject to the mandate and could be administered as part of their adjacent territories.

⁴ This division corresponded to the three main ethnic compositions of the Nigerian territory. The Northern Region was Hausa-dominated, the Western Region, Yoruba and the Eastern Region-Igbo.

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