Cameroon - Nigeria Relations in the face of Secessionist tendencies in both countries

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Abstract
This paper appraises Cameroon-Nigeria relations in the face of secessionist tendencies in both countries. An x-ray of secessionist wars in most countries reveal that they have been propelled by a variety of economic, socio-cultural and political factors in different dimensions. Based extensively on secondary sources, the paper argues that the empathy demonstrated by both Cameroon and Nigeria amidst secessionist trends in both countries between 1967 and 2020 were strategic responses to hard realities that obliged such reactions. The fear of spill over effects warranted the protection of national interest. In fact, there was the need to uphold national security, protect state unity and integration and it thus became imperative to show sympathy to the neighbour’s predicaments. Therefore both states have been forced to show “good neighbourliness”, upholding the moral principle of “one good turn deserve another” in order to guard themselves from not falling victim to secessionist circumstances and by extension keeping their interest intact and not necessarily friendship as the empathy demonstrated was incidental.

Keywords: Ambazonia; Anglophone Problem; Biafra; Cameroon; Nigeria; Relations; Secession; Southern Cameroon

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Background
The people of the two independent political entities of Cameroon and Nigeria which are close neighbours had been in relations with one another for several years before the turn of colonialism, the creation and imposition of colonial international boundaries which eventually made the people “foreigners” to each other. The various ethnic compositions within both territorial confines duly interacted with one another not in the context of international relations as had existed within the framework of German Kamerun and British Nigeria or as exhibited today but as independent nation states performing inter-ethnic relations or cultural diplomacy. Most of the ethnic groups demonstrated a common historical experience and cultural ancestry or lineage as reflected through a vast array of ethnic groups scattered across Nigeria and Cameroon (some of which had been divided by the imposition of colonial artificial boundaries) with Nigerian origins (Njoku: 2012, 198-199, Mark: 2015b, 32). For instance ethnic groups such as the Ejaghams of Nigeria and Cameroon who are located from Nchang near Mamfe in Cameroon and Ikom, Agbokem, the Oban Hills and in Calabar in the Cross River State of Nigeria and the Boki in Manyu (Fanso: 1989, 53, Thomas: 2001, 55). Also, the Banyangs who are settled in Cameroon on the other side of the Cross River Northwards of the Ejaghams of Nigeria often referred to as Anyang, the Keyaka-Eko people share a heavy dose of cultural and ethnic ties with those in neighbouring Nigeria (Mark: 2015b, 32). This is the same scenario with the Mbembe people of Abong in Nigeria and Abongshe in Cameroon who both inhabit the banks of River Donga. They both have historical, ancestral and cultural affinities as all are Mbembe, divided by River Donga which represents the international boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria imposed by the colonialist (Shewa: 2006, 27; Ntoi: 2003, 13). In the North, there existed ethnic groups with settlements that cut across the Nigeria and Cameroon geographical space. The Empire of Kanem Bornu stretched from Northern Nigeria to Northern Cameroon, the Kanuri (Kanuri of Cameroon and Nigeria) always regarded themselves as brethren despite the imposition of colonial boundaries that separated and rendered them as cross border groups (Kane: 1976, 23-24).

Before colonialism, the numerous ethnic groups in Cameroon and Nigeria relied and made advantage of their social, economic and political contacts for survival and sustainability (Mark: 2015b, 32). Territorial proximity, inter-ethnic relations and the search for goods and slaves favoured the establishment of profitable economic relations and opportunities amongst the various ethnic compositions (Mark: 2015a, 224). For example, thanks to their geographical and historical closeness, the people of Northern Cameroon and Nigeria enjoyed and shared a wealth of commercial opportunities. They shared important trade routes the expanded from Garoua in Cameroon to Yola in Nigeria, Maroua to Mubi, Mora to Maiduguri. Another important trade route went from Ngaoundere via Kontcha to Yola. Through these commercial routes the people exchanged products and goods such as glass, leather goods, cowries, stencilled, clothes, beads brought in by Fulani and Hausa traders from Northern Nigeria especially from Sokoto Kano (Mark: 2015b,35). One of the principal trade items from Cameroon were slaves obtained from raids prominent during the Trans Saharan trade era (Cham-Langhee: 1995), kola nuts, wild pepper, ivory, salt, oil. The major commercial centres in Cameroon were located in Mbum, Tibati, Banyo, Bali, Ngaoundere,
Bum with trade routes which included Bali-Bum, Nso-Takum, Banyo-Gashaka, Kontcha-Bakundu Ngaoundere, Bum and Yola (the latter two) existed since the period of the Trans-Saharan trade (Nixon: 2011). However, it was only by the end of the 19th century that the Bamenda Grassfields was very much opened to the trading network of the Benue and Adamawa (Warnier: 1985, 141-148). The difficult terrain of the Grassfields with high mountainous features and lack of navigable rivers only warranted portage trading (Nyanjoh: 2011, 5-7). Bum for example dominated trade and the trade routes with Wukari and Fumban occupied a strategic trade route position with Banyo. The Nso Fondom supplied kola nuts derived from Nsungli and Nso land to Nigeria via Banyo, Yola and Takum. The Banyo trade route was greatly affected with the presence of the British and French who upon colonialism set up customs post as it became a colonial international boundary (Ibid: 7).

The peoples Beba, Bum, Wum, Befang and Esimbi became middlemen thanks to proximity with Nigerian markets. They obtained Dane guns, cartridges, castor, oil, salt from Nigeria and supplied beads, meat, tobacco, hoes, spears heads, machete bags and sometimes slaves. These commercial dealings had long been established before the colonial times (Mafiamba, 1965, 6). In the later part of the 19th century traders from Nkambe traded with Nigerian through Ako with Abong in Nigeria and also the Fon of Bafut dispatched traders as far as Takum who traded with traders from Takum and the Ibos who were interested in traders in the Grassfields. Most Ibos later on settled and established business ventures in the towns of Bamenda, Kumba, Limbe, Younde, Daoula (Mark: 2015b, 36).

The autonomy, inter-ethnic relations, cultural and trade exchanges between the numerous ethnic groups, empires, kingdoms, fondoms across Nigeria and Cameroon were disrupted following contacts with the colonialists. They arbitrarily disorganised, interrupted and disintegrated the relations and activities that had long been in existence between the different groups by subjugating and placing them under their control and governance. Following British conquest and subjugation expeditions, the numerous autonomous ethnic polities in Nigeria, by January 1st 1914 had been conquered and fused to form the British colony of Nigeria with Lord Frederick Lugard as Governor General (Cynado: 2019, 1; Tunde: 2011, 20-22). Britain became the new leader or administrator of Nigeria. The Germans emerged as the colonial authorities in Cameroon by overtaking the British and French when they signed a treaty of annexation with the Douala kings and chiefs on July 12th 1884. The Germano-Douala Treaty as it became known marked the official beginning of the German rule in Cameroon and Dr. Max Buchner was appointed as the Imperial Representative and the German flag hoisted over the Cameroon soil on July 14th 1884. This meant that the Douala kings and chiefs had given up their authority over their land and their independence to the Germans. The Berlin West African Conference of 1884-1885 recognised Cameroon as a German colonial possession (Ngoh: 1979, 8). The Berlin Conference without the opinion or participation of the Africans endorsed the creation of new African states with European imposed colonial artificial boundaries. This disorganised, displaced, disoriented and disunited the African continent in favour of the acquisition of European territorial possession for economic, agricultural, sub soil, cultural and human exploitation for the sole benefit of the European powers (Babatola: 2012, 4-5). The Germans and the British signed a good number of treaties in establishing and creating the boundary between their colonies.
However, the last of such treaties was the March 11th 1913 treaty which was intended to correct the lapses or errors of the previous treaties and as a result of the outbreak of the World War One (WWI), it became the most important and official treaty in the geographical demarcation of British Nigeria and German Cameroon (Ikome: 2004, 11). Nigeria and Cameroon therefore became the final products of colonial ambitions. This therefore implied that henceforth the dealings and interactions of the indigenes of both (Nigeria and Cameroon) entities with each other felt under the context of international relations which hitherto was not the case.

Following the outbreak of WWI and the defeat and ousting of the Germans from Cameroon by the Allied powers (Britain, France and Belgium), German Cameroon was divided between Britain and France. Britain took one fifth while France got the remaining four fifth. The Franco-British Declaration of July 10th 1919, defined the boundary between French and British Mandate Cameroons. Though Britain administered her portion (British Southern Cameroon and British Northern Cameroon) as integrals of Nigeria for administrative purposes, the 1913 border was retained (Ambity: 2013, 291). With the end of WWII, the United Nations (UN) on December 13th 1946 placed Cameroon under Trusteeship status and the Trusteeship Agreement re-ratified the borders as indicted by the Anglo-German Agreement or Anglo-French understandings (Ibid, 291). Maintaining the international boundaries which differentiated British Nigeria from (the former German Cameroon) under British and French administration, this boundary line more or less became a regional boundary between Eastern Nigeria and Southern Cameroon and same was the case in the North with Northern Nigeria and British Northern Cameroon (Jonathan et el: 2013, 184). Eastwards, the new boundary line between French Administered Cameroon and the British Cameroon was regarded as the new international boundary.

With the enforcement of the decolonisation processes in Africa after WWII, the French Cameroons gained independence on January 1st 1960 as the Republique du Cameroun. The British Southern Cameroons and the British Northern Cameroons decided the path of their destinies in UN organised plebiscites. The British Northern Cameroons voted in favour of Nigeria and joined the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria while the British Southern Cameroons voted massively to gain independence by joining the independent Republique du Cameroun. This independence was achieved on October 1st 1961 with the formation of the Federal Republic Cameroon. The British Southern Cameroons became the West Cameroon State while the Republique du Cameroun was the East Cameroon State of the new federal republic. Thus, after the independence of both states, though the colonial boundary was maintained, it had been thwarted in the Northern portions of both states with Northern Cameroon joining Nigeria and in the South; the boundary remained the same as British Southern Cameroon reunified with the Republique du Cameroun. Thus warranting the respect of the 1913 colonial boundary dispositions which after WWI, became more of regional boundary between Nigeria and British Southern Cameroons (Jonathan et el: 2013, 184). Being independent states, both countries went on in the early 1960s in establishing bilateral diplomatic relations by signing an Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation and a Trade Agreement in 1963. There were other bilateral treaties and agreements sunged over the years which nonetheless, the relationship of both states has had period’s complexities and
understanding. Understanding from both nations towards each other has been exhibited especially in the face of secessionist tendencies that put their respective unity and integrity at peril. These secessionist trends appeared as a result of the nature of the balkanisation of ethnic groups by the colonialists, followed by the establishment of new states with cultural pluralism and political dynamism which have been poorly managed. These two broad factors are an embodiment of dynamics such as ethnic, linguistic, religious, identity, democratisation, discrimination that have led to civil wars or secessionist agitations in Nigeria and Cameroon.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Post-Colonial Theory that illuminates the consequences of colonialism on post-colonial states, exhibited in Africa by civil wars, coups, poor governance, corruption, general economic hardship, inter-ethnic tensions, chaos, bloodshed and wars of secession. The arbitrary division of peoples or ethnic groups, imposition of new languages and cultures which unfortunately were maintained by a vast majority of the post-independence states and poorly managed in most countries have been the sources of secessionist wars in many countries in Africa including Cameroon and Nigeria (Edward: 1978). The study is also fixed on the Frustration-Aggression theory. Propended in 1939, the theory intimates that “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression” (Dollard et al: 1939, 1). Revised in 1941, Dollard et al added that “frustration produces instigation to aggression but is not the only type of instigation that it may produce” (Mill N. et al: 339). Drawing from the above theory, aggression in the secessionist agitations in Nigeria in 1967 coupled with the recent resurgence of separatist movements, violence and bloodshed and with the “Ambozonian” revolution in Cameroon which for the past four years counting have been very bloody can be better situated in this context. After decades of marginalisation, repression, assimilation, the non-respect of cultural identity and the absence of political rights worsened by the arrogance and the lack of political will by the government in resolving their problems, instigated by their frustrations, the Anglophones became violent or aggressive towards the central government. Political segregation and bad governance, compounded by protracted religious and ethnic tensions and division in the Nigerian case forced the subalterns or “Biafrans” to see aggression as the last option of redeeming themselves from the aggressors. This attitude has been gathering momentum in recent years with the resurgence of secessionist movements in Nigeria adopting violent measures, though some claim to chart their course without the use violence. In like manner, the Grievance-Rebellion theory explores the circumstances that can push people to protest with inducement rooted in meaningful grievances summarised in political exclusion, inter group hatred and that rebellion is liable to occur if they become severe (Paul & Anke: 2004, 12-13). In fact, the general feeling of dissatisfaction among a group expressing inequalities in general affairs can lead to secessionist movements or agitations in a means to break away from the dominant group as was/is the case with the “Biafrans” in Nigeria and the “Ambazonians” or Anglophones in Cameroon.
Secessionist’s trends in Nigeria
The Nigerian Civil War otherwise known as the 30 Months War lasted from 1967 to 1970 just few years after Nigeria’s independence in 1960. The war broke out as a result of social complexities and geopolitical disparities within the new state. A broad view on the causes depicts differences in socio-economic developments, the Tiv riots of 1964, the federal elections of 1964, the structural imbalances of the Nigerian federation, the 1965 Western regional crisis, the military coups of January 15th and July 29th 1966 which was compounded by the killings of Igbos living in the North between May to September 1966 coupled with the asymmetric distribution of powers among the various ethnic geopolitical groups. The immediate cause of the war was the Igbo declaration of the independent Republic of Biafra named after the Bight of Biafra on May 30th 1967 by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Chukwuemeka Ojokwu who was the Governor of the Eastern Region (James: 2011, 120; Cervenka: 1972; Nathaniel: 2001, 2; Oyeweso: 1992; Lasse & Dirk: 2014, 172). The war was principally between the Igbos and the Federal Military Government (FMG) of General Yakubu Gowon. The Federal military government determined to maintain the unity and integrity of the state responded by attacking the declared secessionist republic on July 6th 1966. The declaration of the Bifran independence which was followed by war weeks later drew the attention of the international community in general, and Cameroon in particular. To neighbouring Cameroon and her government in particular there could have been potential spilled over effects of the war on her young nation which could have jeopardized efforts of consolidating national unity and integration which at this period was under construction.

Although the war ended in 1970, secessionist ideologies were far from being eradicated most especially as new secessionist groups have emerged in recent years though the Country embraced democratic principles 1999. These groups have as principal objective; the creation new states or the restoration of the state of Biafra. The new secessionist movements that are resurfacing include; Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVE), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) whole ultimate goal is to achieve the restoration of the Biafran state through non-violent methods, Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Oduduwa and Niger Delta Republics, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu. The Nigerian government has had a hard time in trying to contain the political ambitions of these secessionist groups.

Cameroon reaction towards the Nigerian (“Biafran Secessionist”) Civil War of 1967-1970
Cameroons position in response to the Nigerian Civil War was that of neutrality at the beginning when the war broke out. But as events unfolded, the Cameroon government for strategic internal and security reasons was against the secessionist tendency of the Biafrans. In respect of the OAU charter which had amongst its principles; the respect of the non-interference in the internal affairs of states and the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, President Amadou Ahidjo and the Cameroon government decided
to stay off the internal squabble of Nigeria. President Amadou Ahidjo readily made available his services in the holding of mediation between the FMG and the Biafran secessionist faction. Amadou Ahidjo was member of a mediation committee of six presidents that was set up by the OAU on September 14th 1967 in attempts geared at resolving the war (Patrick: 1995, 203). Ahidjo did not stop at severely criticizing individuals and nations that were supporting the Biafran secessionist war, though Ahidjo’s position put him at variance with some strategic allies like France who had pro-Biafran positions. He accused them of being responsible for the loss of lives and destruction of property caused by the war (Julius: 2020, 9). Again, despite bearing grudges resulting from the loss of British Northern Cameroon to Nigeria in the 1961 plebiscites, wherein the Northerners voted in favour of joining the federation of Nigeria, Ahidjo was empathic towards the Gowon administration. This was due to the fact that President Amodou Ahidjo from Northern Cameroon sympathized with Gowon who himself was from Northern Nigeria, a region that is geographically, religiously, culturally, historically and linguistically attached to Ahidjo’s Northern Cameroon (Patrick, 204). Ahidjo therefore showed his support for his fellow brethren’s dilemma.

In the face of the Biafran secessionist war, six months into the war, Ahidjo and the government of Cameroon, provisionally allowed the Nigerian FMG to use portions of the Bakassi Peninsular such as Jabane to monitor or block vital supplies of arms and ammunitions by France via Gabon to the Biafran separatist army into Calabar. In fact, Ahidjo closed the Cameroon border with Nigeria in the Southern West portion to prevent the Biafran army from taking refuge and organising their attacks from Cameroon (Shaibu et al: 2015, 29; Julius: 2020, 9). Ahidjo and the Cameroon government further demonstrated their benevolence to the Nigerian FMG when Ahidjo prohibited the supply of arms, medicine foodstuff and other vital shipments from Cameroon to Nigeria. Again, he authorised the Cameroon Red Cross Association to lend a hand of assistance to the Nigerian Red Cross. Ahidjo’s total support to the Nigerian FMG prompted the interpretation of the Cameroon Ambassador to Nigeria who at one point intimated that “Ahidjo had become more Nigerian than Cameroonian” (Toreent: 2012, 141). This was an illustration of the amount of goodwill and support which the Cameroon government rendered to the FMG of Nigeria in securing and safeguarding her territorial integrity and unity. In addition, President Ahidjo in 1970 made available his services when he acted as the mediator in the negotiations between Nigeria and Gabon for the repatriation back to Nigeria of 3,500 Biafran children who had been in refuge in Gabon since 1968. The repatriation process of the refugee children was completed by February 8, 1971(Nathaniel: 2001, 16-17).

Nonetheless, a critical examination of the events that were unfolding in Cameroon during that same period, reveal that the goodwill or sympathy which Ahidjo expressed to the troubles of his neighbour were incidental. He aimed at protecting Cameroon’s internal security, territorial unity and to secure his internal political ambitions in Cameroon which could have been affected by the Nigerian situation. The discovery of oil deposit in 1964 in the Ndian area of West Cameroon just three years before the outbreak of the Biafran war also greatly influenced Ahidjo’s position in regards to the Nigerian Civil War or “Biafran War of

secession” (Joseph: 2017, 43). Ahidjo had already conceived secret plans of controlling the oil deposit of the Ndian area. He was very frightened by the events in Nigeria and more to that, events that had happened in the Katanga region of the Congo in the early 1960s were also speaking to the mind of Ahidjo. Thus he was ready to put up every means possible to avoid such a situation happening in Cameroon. In fact, it was not a coincidence that in 1972, just two years after the end of the Biafran secession war, Ahidjo dismantled the federal structures in order to eliminate the boundaries between West and East Cameroon and instituted a centralised unitary state which gave him the powers to control oil in West Cameroon, a firm grip on the state and administrative machinery (Ibid, 43). It should also be underscored that during this same period (the late 1960s), Ahidjo was in the execution of the process of national unity and national integration which was already being threatened by some disgruntled and descending voices from some quarters of West Cameroon, reproaching the manner in which the state was being governed. The Anglophones or West Cameroonians were already experiencing minority issues. Again, the geographical proximity of the Biafran region to West Cameroon was a serious factor that could have had spill over effects on West Cameroon (Cronje: 1972, 292). This was further compounded by Vice President John Ngu Foncha’s gesture (from West Cameroon) who, while representing Ahidjo at an international conference in 1970 in Gabon, offered 500,000 francs to Biafran refugees in Libreville despite Ahidjo’s refusal to give in to the demands of President Charles De Gaulle of France to support the Biafran cause. Ahidjo understood Foncha’s act of generosity to be his sign of sympathy to the Biafran cause. Ahidjo was already scared that the Biafran secessionist tendencies could overflow into West Cameroon. He was bent on deterring any possible Biafran-West Cameroon alliance. Foncha was thus sacked and replaced by Solomon Tandeng Muna (Joseph: 2017, 44). From the foregone, it is therefore evident that Ahidjo did not sympathize per se with the Nigerian FMG, but was forced by the circumstances in Cameroon that could have been escalated by the Nigerian case and thwart his political ambitions and internal policies. To guard his political ambitions and his government’s nation building and national integration process from falling prey to his neighbour’s predicaments, Ahidjo had to demonstrate goodwill.

Secessionist Agitation in Cameroon (2016-Present)

It should however be understood that the Anglophone Problem is not a problem of marginalisation, assimilation or domination per se. It is the non-respect of the constitutional provisions that were arrived at in Foumban in July 1961 during the constitutional talks
between La Republique du Cameroon and the British Southern Cameroons. Amongst other things, it was agreed that the state will adopt a federal structure as the best option that would guarantee the protection and preservation the socio-political, legal, linguistic, cultural and educational structures of both British southern Cameroons and la Republique du Cameroon. In fact, it was the high aspirations of the British southern Cameroonians to protect their Anglo-Saxon cultural identity. Regrettably, the union between Southern Cameroons and La Republique du Cameroon underwent several political modifications from the federal structures that were adopted in 1961 to a unitary state in 1972 and in 1984 the country’s name was changed from the United Republic of Cameroon to the simply the Republic of Cameroon (La Republique du Cameroun), the name that was adopted by French Cameroun at her independence in January 1960. The Anglophones repeatedly criticised the status quo and questioned the morality/legality of the constitutional or political changes and concluded that they were all geared towards their assimilation or annexation (Fanso: 2012, 1). These generated general discontent among the Anglophones embodied in the Anglophone Problem and by extension led to struggles for autonomy either within a federation or total secession from Cameroon.

The secessionist or separatist agitations in Anglophone Cameroon can therefore be likened to the manifestation of grievances and social vexation caused by dominant practices and behaviours in the conduct and drive of the political ambition, nature of the constitution, the political economy of exclusion, inequality, social repression, absorption and disregard to cultural identity (Kingsely & Jan: 2016, 93). This has been compounded by the memories of the Anglophones of a period which has been lucidly described as the “Golden Age” (Anthony: 2016). This period which spans from 1954 when the Southern Cameroons was granted quasi autonomy within the federation of Nigeria, to 1958 when it was conferred full autonomy till 1972 when it lost its autonomy following the dismantling of the federal structures. The dismantling of the federal structures did not only lead to the loss of their autonomy but it also disempowered the Anglophones in the face of competition in the political machinery and the political economy demonstrated by the dominant presence of the Francophone cultural identity in the state apparatus. Though the Southern Cameroons or West Cameroon state of the federation was never an independent political entity, the secessionist or separatist agitations is a response to the political and social conditions (Kathrine & Engelbert: 2006, 7-16), which do not reflect what they formerly enjoyed and not solely cultural differences as there can exist unity in diversity. In 2016, the Anglophone teachers and lawyers repeatedly called on the government to respect the cultural identity of the Anglophones which had for long been relegated to the background with attitudes such as the appointment and transfer of Francophone teachers and magistrates and other Francophone civil servants to Anglophone regions who more often than not, expressed themselves in French. The teachers and lawyers calls were joined by other civil society personalities such as Mancho Bibixy, a journalist at a local radio station in Bamenda, with his “Coffin Revolution” lambasting the general poor road conditions in the city, unemployment, bad governance, the garbage and filth that had engulfed the city (Tembon, 2018:6).

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To better chart the course of their grievances, the teachers and the lawyers formed the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) in 2016. The CACSC was a combination of civil society unions of teachers and lawyers from the North West and South West regions. The movement at the beginning after its creation presented itself as a moderate association. The consortium presented the issues and challenges that were faced by the teachers, students and called for a reform and respect of the Common Law traditions in the English regions. The CACSC organised sit down strikes in October 2016, civil and peaceful protest which met with police and gendarme brutality. The Government made several measures at dialoguing with the consortium but faced a very complex situation. The government in a means to seek solutions to the grievances presented by the consortium failed to appreciate the seriousness and gravity of the problems and therefore did not make a proper diagnosis of the problem. Furthermore, the government was put in an awkward position with the triple face image which the consortium portrayed. Within the consortium there were different shades of opinions; there were some who genuinely wanted the corporate grievances of the trade unions to be resolved, another group demanded the settlement of political issues (constitutional) calling for the return to a two state federation, while the third camp called for complete separation or secession of Anglophone Cameroon (former British Southern Cameroons). Thus in this complexity, it was challenging for the government to adequately situate the problems of the teachers and the lawyers. In fact, the grievances of the consortium opened a Pandora’s Box and the government was unable to understand the problem from its roots.

Once the consortium got the support of the vast majority of the Anglophone population who said they had been marginalised for long, the issue was no more trade union problems. The issues now became political and constitutional grievances and some started calling for the independence of the Anglophone regions. It was hard for the government to accept that the unity and territorial integrity of the state be ruptured. Government responded that it was ready to dialogue and look into all the problems but it should not influence or tamper with the unity and integrity of the republic. The government accused the consortium of in sighting rebellion and terrorist activities against the unity and integrity of the state. The movement was banned by the government in January 2017; its leaders (Barrister Agbor Balla, Dr. Fontem Niba) were arrested and jailed in Yaounde. This response by the government contributed to a combination of other factors such as killings that happened in December, 10, 2016 in Bamenda, internet cut out in both regions from January to April of 2017 amongst other things fuelled the flames of Jacobinism and the demands of federalism gave way to separatist or secessionist ideologies.

On October 1st 2017, thousands of Anglophones stormed the streets and declared what they termed “the restoration of their independence” or better still the independence of the state of “Ambazonia” or the “Federal Republic of Ambazonia” (former British Southern Cameroons).
This was followed by the creation of an Interim Government of Ambozonia in October 1st 2017 with Julius Ayuk Tabe as its president. This was further compounded by the Anglophones in the diaspora who, with the support of some Anglophones back home, have been financing the so called Anglophone revolution or secessionist struggles with the creation of armed secessionist groups like the Southern Cameroon's Defence Forces (SOCADF), the Southern Cameroon's Restoration Movement (SCRM), Ambozonian Defense Force (ADF), Ambozonia Self-Defense Council (ASDC) amongst others. The government reacted to the declaration of the so called Ambazonia independence with force and brutality. In fact, President Paul Biya publicly declared war on the secessionist groups. This led to an increase radicalisation by the armed groups with reasons being that the regular forces had attacked and killed their people who were unarmed. All these secessionist armed groups started fighting for the “independence”, “liberation” or “restoration of the State of Ambazonia”. Most of their attacks (assassinations, kidnappings, mutilations, ambushes) targeted government regular forces which they claimed to be a colonial military of occupation in the Anglophone regions. They have been criticised and blamed of targeting and attacking schools, students, teachers, pupils, hospitals and other civilians who were allegedly accused of not collaborating with the secessionists or feeding the regular forces with information on their whereabouts or activities. This was therefore evident that the manoeuvres had shifted from demands of federalism to outright secession. The violent attacks, hardship, destruction of property, mass displacement of persons (most of whom to Francophone regions and to neighbouring Nigeria) prompted the reaction of several friends and partners of Cameroon including her neighbour Nigeria in particular.

Nigeria’s Response to the Anglophone ("Ambazonia Secessionist") Crisis in Cameroon, 2016-Present

Nigeria’s closeness with the Anglophone regions acts as a fall-back position for most of the separatist fighters and also from where they get most of their supplies in arms and ammunitions due to the porosity of the borders. Nigeria has demonstrated in numerous ways that she is a protagonist in favour of ending the crisis. Nigeria’s reaction to the crisis depicts her sympathy towards the Yaounde government. It is hosting close to 50,000 Cameroon refugees who reside in Nigerian states of Cross River, Benue, Akwa Ibom and Taraba. One fundamental action which the Buari government made, was her collaboration with the Yaounde Government in January 2018 in the arrest and extradition to Cameroon, Ayuk Tabe Julius president of the so called Ambazonia Interim Government and 9 of his lieutenants (Professor Che Augustine, Dr. Fidelis Ndeh-Che, Dr. Cornelius Njikimbi Kwanga, Dr. Egbe

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Ogork Ntui, Dr. Henry Kimeng Tata, Barrister Shufai Blaise Berinyuy, Barrister Eymabe Elias Ebai, Chairman Nfor Ngala Nfor, Mr. Wilfred Tombang Tassang) in a hotel in Abuja and some other suspected separatist or secessionist fighters were arrested in Taraba State in Nigeria and repatriated to Cameroon\textsuperscript{11}. Funny enough, a Federal High Court in Abuja in her decision of March 1\textsuperscript{st} 2019, Justice Chikere ruled the arrest and extradition of Ayuk and Co (47 of them) as illegal and unconstitutional because they had already filed in for asylum. The court ordered that they be sent back to Nigeria. In her ruling, the court intimated that the Federal government had violated the obligations of the National Refugee Commission Act, section 35 of the constitution and article 12 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights which precluded Nigeria from deporting or repatriating asylum seekers from Nigeria\textsuperscript{12}.

Though some commentators view the courts order to imply Nigeria’s role as one of the key stakeholders in seeking lasting solutions to the crisis\textsuperscript{13}, there is much to be understood in the actions of the Buhari government. The courts order nonetheless fell on deaf ears as Ayuk and Co were sentenced to life in prison in August 20\textsuperscript{th} 2019 by the Yaounde Military court. It should however be noted that there exist no extradition agreement between Cameroon and Nigeria that would have put the arrest and deportation of the Cameroonians in Nigeria in legal international framework. Thus the arrest of the Cameroonians in Nigeria has remained very controversial as the legality of the acts has been questioned\textsuperscript{14}. It is also imperative to highlight that, most of the leaders or brains behind most of the separatist armed groups on ground in the two Anglophone regions are located mostly in Europe and in North America and as of present, there is none who has been arrested or deported back to Cameroon. Though the European Union and the American Congress has on several instances urged the Cameroon government to put an end to the crisis. Therefore, the legality of the act by both countries remains very questionable in the face of diplomatic actions. However, some commentators view the act by the Nigerian government as a response to claims that the Cameroon government also forcefully repatriated thousands of Nigerian refugees in the Rann area in Northern Cameroon. To their understanding, Nigeria might present this argument as legitimate and legal international claims\textsuperscript{15}.

In addition to the arrest and extradition of Cameroonians in Nigeria back to Cameroon, the Nigerian security forces also initiated Operation Delta Safe 3 in the Cross River state, more precisely in the Bakassi peninsular area, especially in areas like Akwa found North of the peninsular to restrain the supply of important foodstuff, arms and ammunitions and movement of secessionist combatants into Nigeria as fall-back. Furthermore, the Nigerian government also launched measures to ensure that the humanitarian aid donated to the refugees in the Nigerian states are not used to sponsor the secessionist fighters\textsuperscript{16}. These numerous actions by the Nigerian government against the secessionist drives in Cameroon can be in one way understood as Nigeria’s way of repaying a

\textsuperscript{11} International Crisis Group, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{12} West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network Warn Policy Brief (its report also talk of 47),6.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid,7-8.
\textsuperscript{16} International Crisis Group, “Cameroons Anglophone Crisis, 22.
favour duly owed in regards to Ahidjo’s support and the measures which he took in favour of the NFMG during the Civil (Biafra) War of 1967-70. Ahidjo was a pivotal stakeholder in resolving the civil war and in keeping the territorial unity and integrity of Nigeria. A gesture that was publicly appreciated by General Gowon during a visit of Ahidjo to Nigeria in September 1970, when he openly thanked Ahidjo for his help in securing Nigeria’s unity and two years later, Ahidjo was granted an honorary degree by the University of Lagos for his efforts to African unity (Nigerian unity) and for Cameroon-Nigeria relations (Julius: 2020, 10). Thus the actions of the Nigerian government towards the secessionist revolution in Cameroon can be seen as upholding the moral principle of “one good turn deserve another.”

Be that as it may, it should be however underscored that the Nigerian government is yet to contain separatist movements or ideologies in Nigeria and therefore the Nigerian action warrants a deeper understanding. Nonetheless, the move was saluted by Cameroon’s Minister of Territorial Administration (Minister of Interior) Paul Atanga Nji during an exclusive interview on national television on Sunday November 1st 2020. While criticising the killing of 7 students in a private school in Kumba, South West Region, the Minister called upon friends and partners of Cameroon wherein other secessionist leaders reside and are fanning and fuelling the flames of separation or acts of secession to be arrested and extradited to Cameroon. Quoting President Paul Biya, he added that acts of terrorism are a global problem which demands a synergy of global collaboration and intervention. He publicly acknowledged and thanked the Nigerian government for their collaboration in the arrest and extradition of Ayuk Tabe Julius and Co back in January of 2018 and urged the other friends of Cameroon to follow Nigeria’s example. An appeal that was further stressed by President Paul Biya during his end of year speech addressed to the nation on December 20th, 2020. He called upon friends and partner countries of Cameroon who are hosting leaders of the secessionist groups to take measures in assisting Cameroon by arresting the leaders so that they can respond to their acts.

It is imperative to note that while secessionist crisis developed in Cameroon by the end of 2016, Nigeria is yet to totally contain secessionist ideals since its emergence in 1967. The Nigerian government succeeded in containing the Biafran War but failed to eradicate secessionist ideologies or feelings as there has been continues secessionist attempt over the years across the Nigerian territory till present date. The return to civil rule in May 29th 1999 has not effectively guaranteed the enhancement of corporate existence in Nigeria within the various geo-polities. This has been explored and exploited by ethno regional tendencies, backed by a new political elite with secessionists, autonomous or separatist philosophies and exhibited in the re-emergence of secessionist groups in recent years which pose a serious threat to the unity and integrity of modern Nigeria (Nsambe: 2014, 153). Since November 15th 2015, there has been a vibrant resurgence of secessionist agitations in Nigeria. This is partly explained by the political and democratic systems of governance plagued with abnormalities and considered faulty (Kingsley & Jan: 2016, 89). However, the Nigerian government has over the years adopted numerous government “consensual” policies to reflect the interest of all the ethnic polities in Nigeria. For instance the adoption of the “Federal Character Principle” (FCP) in the 1971 constitution at the end of the secessionist

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17 Scenes de Press on CRTV of Sunday, November 1, 2020.
war was part of the efforts at fostering integration and unity among the Nigerians whose religious and ethnic differences constitute potential sources separatist conflicts. The end point was to build a nation of equal opportunities which every individual felt that/or had equal chances to participate in charting the political and societal course of the nation in the absence of bias or ethnic affiliations (Nsembe: 2014). While the Nigerian Federation was conscious of the ethno-cultural and religious differences in the composition of Nigeria and sorting out ways that could “genuinely” integrate the Nigerians of every religious and ethnic backgrounds and bring secessionist or autonomous ideals to their lowest ebb by opting for a federal character principle structure, Cameroon’s case was a direct contrast. Despite the adoption of the FCP in Nigeria, it has not been realistic as it was envisaged due to problems linked to its practicality and functioning, demonstrating that some ethnic groups as still under represented (Bello: 2012, 7-14). The FCP has hardly been able to erase secessionist ideals in Nigeria due to its shortcomings and this is evident with a multiplicity of secessionist or self-determination ethnic militias that are resurfacing in Nigeria since 1999 when the country embraced new democratic principles. These groups most of which are ethno-regional have been contesting political space and the dividends of democracy, social and economic space as part of the liberalisations movements in the search of autonomy via the leadership of their leaders in whom they believe are capable of rational reasoning (Mike et el: 2020, 3-4). The dominant groups include: Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVE), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) whose ultimate goal is to achieve the restoration of the Biafran state through non-violent methods, Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Oduduwa and Niger Delta Republics, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, (Mike et el: 2020, Abada et el: 2020, Nsambe: 2014, Kingsley & Jan: 2016, Ikenna et el: 2019). The MASSOB under the leadership of Mr Ralph Uwazurike employed secessionist strategies such as raising Bifar flags in public places, peaceful marches and protest, the issuing of a Biafran currency and passport contesting the writ of the Nigerian state.

The Nigerian government on several occasions reacted by tracking and arresting the leaders and perpetrators. Despite all the crackdowns on the groups and its sympathisers, the groups continued their activities advocating the achievement of the independent state of Biafra through non-violence means. The BZF, a more violent group, on June 5th 2014 attacked the Enugu State Broadcasting Service (ESBS) and the Enugu State House of Assembly in an attempt to hoist their flag. The IPOB has been more provocative in character such as the creation of Radio Biafra used for propaganda and its actions have had serious socio-political and economic consequences. In 2017 its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, who has on several occasion been arrested for treason and felony against the state, ordered a sit at home strike on May 30th, in all the South Eastern States and even the South South States which put all economic and social activities grounded with devastating socio-economic implications. (Ikenna et el: 2019, 113-114). The Nigerian government reacted by abrogating Radio Biafra and declared IBOP as a terrorist group. Again, the government organised a military crackdown in September 14th 2017 in what it termed “Operation Python Dance” in Abia
state. Nnamdi Kanu was arrested along other members. (Mike et el: 2020, 8). Thus it is evident that the Nigerian government is also battling numerous secessionist problems.

A critical look at the Buhari government response to the secessionist revolution in Cameroon suggests logical thinking. It will be illogical to think that the Nigerian government that have been battling with secessionist inclinations since 1967 and which have been revived in recent years with the proliferation of secessionist agitation groups will want to support the so called Ambazonia revolution in neighbouring Cameroon. Nigeria who is yet to take care of her internal ethno-regional secessionist security problems and could/can therefore hardly sympathize with Cameroon separatists. Again, there is also the fear that events in Cameroon can have spill over effects in Nigeria considering the multiplicity in the resurgence of self-determination autonomous movements with secessionist ideologies. Furthermore, the Nigerian government, just like Ahidjo’s fears during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), is also scared of a scenario of possible coalition between the self-determination autonomous movements in Nigeria and the Ambazonia revolution to fight for their independence. This fear is further compounded by the geographical closeness that exist between the self-determination ethno-polities in Nigeria and the Cameroon Anglophone Regions (“Ambazonia”). It should also be mentioned that these are polities that do not only have geographical proximity but also have cultural affinities and share a colonial history. It is imperative to highlight the fact that, former Southern Cameroons (the two Anglophone regions or the so called Ambazonia) was administered by the British after the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 at the of the First World War as an integral part of British Nigeria where it evolved as province of Eastern Nigeria with capital in Enugu till 1954, when it was granted quasi autonomy till 1958 when it became an autonomous territory within the Nigerian federation (Joseph: 2017, 40). There is therefore the fear that this shared colonial history between these ethno-polities can ignite a reciprocal sympathy among them in granting each other assistance in order to achieve their goals. From the foregone, it is understood that Nigeria’s response to the prevailing secessionist movement in Cameroon was more strategic than out of mere sympathy. In fact, just as Ahidjo and the Cameroon government did back in the late 1960s during the Civil War, Nigeria is guarding herself from not falling prey to her neighbour’s predicaments and is therefore bound to show empathy and good neighbourliness due to hard circumstances that oblige her.

**Conclusion**

Relations between Cameroon and Nigeria over the past decades after both countries attained independence have experienced periods of ups and downs. The most evident period of strained relations between both countries was the crisis over the oil rich Bakassi Peninsular which started in the 1970s and became bloody in the 1990s, resolved by the International Court of Justice in 2002 and concluded with the signing of the Green Tree Accord in 2006. Notwithstanding the turbulent periods in the Cameroon-Nigeria relations, there have been periods of cordiality demonstrated by their effective collaboration for the fight against the Boko Haram Terrorist Sect in the Northern parts of both countries. Again their responses to secessionist trends in both countries have seemingly depicted high level of cordiality and good ties of friendship which Cameroon and Nigeria share. However, this paper has been
able to demonstrate that the responses by both Cameroon and Nigeria to secessionist movements in both countries since 1967 with outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War to the Anglophone or “Secessionist Ambazania” revolution in 2016 were not out of sheer sympathy. They were strategic responses obliged by hard facts, exigencies and realities in the respective countries that could be jeopardized or be worsened with spill over effects. In fact, their reactions were precautionary in guarding themselves from falling prey to the predicaments of the neighbour, to protect national interest, preserve territorial unity and integrity and not necessarily friendship.

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