

Constructions of Identity in Cameroonian History Textbooks in Relation to the Reunification of Cameroon

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Abstract • This article explores the representation of identity in selected Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonian history textbooks via their coverage of the reunification of Cameroon. A far-reaching effect of the 1916 Anglo-French partition of German Cameroon and of the reunification of the territory in 1961 is that, in spite of the plurality of precolonial identities, it is the legacies of Anglo-French colonial heritage that seem to be the overwhelming identity indicators in contemporary Cameroon. This content analysis found that the Anglophone history textbook presented a clear Anglophone identity which stood in conflict with the identity promoted by the Francophone textbook, which was characterized by national and colonial Francophone assimilationism. Such representations suggest that the Cameroonian nation state as a colonial geopolitical construct is more imagined than real.

Keywords • Anglophone, Cameroon, Francophone, history textbooks, identity, othering, reunification

Introduction and Background

Before the arrival of European colonizers, the territory and people that make up present-day Cameroon existed, though not as one nation. Roughly two hundred tribes had settled in the region as a result of migration and existed as sovereign entities. Historical accounts suggest that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the region in the fifteenth century. During

this period, Portuguese explorer Fernando Po and his team arrived on the coast of the geographical region now known as Cameroon and were reputedly overwhelmed by the amount of prawns they saw in the Wouri River estuary. As a consequence, they named the river *Rio dos Cameroes*, which means “River of Prawns.”¹ This made the idea of “prawns” the first identity marker associated with the name Cameroon, as it would eventually evolve from the Portuguese appellation.²

The region escaped European colonialism until the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884. The subsequent division of Africa between European nations marked the official beginning of German colonial rule in Cameroon. This was also the beginning of Cameroon as a geopolitical construction under colonial administration, which served to absorb the numerous tribes living in the region. This era, characterized by the unified systems of administration and education, the colonially imposed language and culture, and the well-defined boundaries that came with German colonialization, can thus be seen as having given rise to the idea of a national identity and citizenship in Cameroon.

However, this German Cameroonian national identity was disrupted with the defeat of Germany in the First World War, which resulted in the partitioning of the territory between Britain and France at Versailles. The Anglo-French partition marked a significant historical moment for Cameroon in terms of identity politics and otherness in the sense that it defined, to a large extent, the geopolitical dispensation of postcolonial and present-day Cameroon. In the partition agreement, France and Britain received, respectively, three quarters and one quarter of the territory and its inhabitants.³ It has been argued that this disproportionate partitioning laid the foundation for the Francophone majority and Anglophone minority identity crisis in the region that continues to dominate contemporary Cameroonian political discourse⁴

British and French occupation was the status quo up to the start of African decolonization in the 1950s, which resulted in the independence of French Cameroon on 1 January 1960. The British Cameroonian territories remained part of the British Empire. On 11 February 1961, the United Nations organized a plebiscite in British Cameroon, which presented the population with the choice between independence via integration with Nigeria or reunification with French Cameroon. Calls for a third option of complete independence were rejected by the United Nations. Northern British Cameroon subsequently voted for integration with Nigeria, while Southern British Cameroon voted for reunification with French Cameroon on 1 October 1961.

The reunification of the two territories of Cameroon was not a smooth process, but rather the outcome of a series of political maneuvers (characterized by diplomacy and dialogue, but also by machinations) and, ultimately, of a succession of upheavals that put pressure on the colonial authorities of both zones. Yet even with full sovereignty achieved through independence and reunification, societal integration remained a daunting task. Although the reunification of 1961 saw the birth of modern postcolonial Cameroon, the postcolonial (re)construction of the nation state was bound to be challenging, given that the earlier processes of colonial state formation had produced “territorial differences in languages and cultural legacies [that had] laid the spatial and historical foundation for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities.”⁵ The new country was organized, via a federal constitution along colonial lines, into two zones, Francophone and Anglophone, each with its own colonial-inherited education and legal system and internalized colonial identity.⁶ Via a referendum on 20 May 1972, the Federal Republic of Cameroon was renamed the United Republic of Cameroon, a change which served to negate the federal nature of the reunification. In the wake of a presidential decree in 1982, the country was again renamed, becoming the Republic of Cameroon, which had been the name of

independent French Cameroon. For Anglophone Cameroonians, these constitutional changes were tantamount to the undoing of reunification in favor of assimilation of the former British Southern Cameroon into former French Cameroon.

The result was an atmosphere of simmering tension which came to a head in 2016, fifty-five years after reunification. According to a report published by the International Crisis Group in 2017, the “Anglophone crisis” in Cameroon began on 11 October 2016, in Bamenda, the capital of the Anglophone Northwest Region. On that day, lawyers from the Northwest and the Southwest Regions went on strike to protest the justice system’s failure to apply common law in the two regions, the “francophonization” of common law jurisdictions, and the appointment of Francophone magistrates with no knowledge of either common law or English. The report goes on to describe the events of 21 November, when Anglophone teachers went on strike to protest the lack of Anglophone educators, the appointment of non-Anglophone teachers to the region’s schools, and the government’s overall failure to respect the “Anglo-Saxon” character and identity of the region’s schools and universities. The protests, led by lawyers and teachers, were joined by different sectors of the Anglophone population, including students from the University of Buea. The police and the army violently dispersed the demonstrators. According to a report by the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (Commission nationale des droits de l’Homme et des libertés, CNDHL), several people were severely beaten, dozens were arrested, and at least two people were shot dead.⁷

The Francophone-dominated government of Paul Biya (the president of Cameroon since November 1982) initially tried to maintain the status quo. However, realizing there were limits to what could be achieved by repression, it began talks, and in late November 2016 an inter-ministerial committee, consisting of four Francophone ministers under the supervision of the

prime ministry's cabinet director, was charged with leading negotiations. In early December, the protesting lawyers and teachers formed the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), which initially consisted of four lawyers' associations and several teachers' trade unions under the directorship of Félix Khongo Agbor Balla (president), Fontem Neba (secretary-general), and Wilfred Tassang (treasurer).

According to a CNN news report published in January 2017, the CACSC and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), another influential activist group, responded to the killing, harassment, and intimidation of protesters by instructing their supporters to adopt nonviolent resistance by staying at home, in what became known as "Operation Ghost Town."⁸ The same report states that on 17 January, the Cameroonian government banned both groups, holding them responsible for the protests. CACSC President Agbor Balla and Secretary-General Neba were arrested on charges relating to terrorism. According to the state media, the Ministry of Territorial Administration declared the groups "null and void for their purpose and activities which are contrary to the Constitution and liable to jeopardize the security of the State, territorial unity and national integration."⁹ In an attempt to suppress the protests that ensued and assert its authority, the government suspended internet services in the two Anglophone regions. The shutdown appears to have emboldened rather than crushed dissent and tensions boiled over on 1 October 2017, when protesters in Cameroon's Anglophone regions took to the streets, calling for symbolic independence from the country's French-speaking majority and demanding a return to a federal system of government. The protests were violently suppressed by the military, resulting in numerous deaths, and the internet was shut down once again.¹⁰

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights urged the two sides to engage in dialogue and called on the Cameroonian authorities to exercise restraint. This

call was reinforced by a statement by Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner, who observed that “credible sources indicate that some of these deaths resulted from excessive use of force by the security forces” and called on the government to guarantee the “right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, including through having uninterrupted access to the Internet.”¹¹ The United Nations also reported that some 160,000 people from the Anglophone regions had fled their homes and were either living in the bush or had moved to the relatively calm Francophone regions as internally displaced persons.¹² It was also reported that over 20,000 Anglophones had fled to Nigeria as refugees, while others had found their way to Europe and the United States. Despite numerous calls for dialogue from national and international bodies including the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Nations, the Francophone-dominated government remained intransigent and chose the military option to resolve the crisis. Due to government actions, some protesters began demanding complete secession or the restoration of pre-independence Southern Cameroon statehood.

Against the background of reunification and its significance for Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians, this article investigates the manner in which these identities have been constructed in the history textbooks of the respective zones.

Relevant Literature

Many countries have an interest in creating national approaches to history, especially when considering the major challenges associated with dealing with the concepts of “us,” “them,” or the “other.” Cameroon is no exception and concerns in this regard relate directly to issues of historical identity. In the Cameroonian context, this challenge is even more daunting, considering the country’s multidimensional identity structure, discussed above. In Cameroon, slogans such as

“unity in diversity” or “diversity in unity” are most often used as tools to promote national integration in the face of multiple identities.¹³ While these slogans were created with the understanding that societal unity and peace could be maintained through diversity, in practice they have served to maintain a unitary national identity.

History can perform a powerful role in identity construction by providing a forum for political disputes about a nation’s place in the world.¹⁴ For example, political speeches often reference history in general, or a specific event, in order to lend credibility to political ideologies, justify political actions, or situate the contemporary world within a historical context that articulates the framework of the messages the government wishes to propagate.¹⁵ The influence and importance of history in the construction of identity on various (national, cultural, and individual) societal levels can thus be explained by approaching history as a dynamic process which is, so to speak, under constant construction. Consequently, encounters with history influence the way individuals see themselves and others, by helping to create a sense of the self and a collective identity. According to Andrew Mycock,¹⁶ nationally orientated histories appear to be more influential than other forms of history writing in shaping how politicians and policy makers design curricula and textbooks. Such national narratives seek to achieve two main objectives. They legitimize the nation by “teleologically connecting the past with the present to achieve contemporary political goals,” and they construct “national narratives ... to support national identities that bind citizens to historically justified national communities.”¹⁷ The result is a history of reference points that underpin the intimate relationship between people, their histories, and their identities. At the same time, this approach to history strengthens people’s ability to overturn rival discourses. Many states, especially in postcolonial settings, have engaged in “selective myopia,” whereby collective acts of forgetting or reinterpretation have been used to

reimagine postcolonial national identities,¹⁸ particularly regarding people's origins and characteristics.

With reference to the above, an identity-formation process includes two socially constructed elements of identity: that of ascribed identity (the identity that others give to an individual or group) and that of achieved identity (the identity that an individual or group construct for themselves).¹⁹ The tension between having a fixed identity ascribed by others (which often represents only one portion of an individual's often complex achieved identity) and a more dynamic achieved identity can have a significant impact on overall identity formation. Histories often play an integral role in the creation of these identities and the tension between them. For example, state regimes or sociopolitical movements often invoke a specific identity as an ultimate reality.²⁰ This may be done in various ways, such as defining the population via census or tax measures, thereby hardening the boundaries of communities that had previously been more diffuse and permeable.²¹ These constructions of identity can, however, change over time.

In this study, we work from the premise that since history is linked to social identification and particular beliefs and values, encounters with history help groups and individuals to construct and make sense of the world and their place in it. At the same time, the contemporary world acts as a context within which history must operate and is thus in turn influenced by the deployment of diverse histories and their impact on modes of thinking and related behaviors. This is the nature of postcolonial or reunified Cameroon as it grapples with issues of identity and otherness.

Although the focus of this study is on the Anglo-French identities in Cameroon, it is important to note that the identity climate of Cameroon is highly complex. Beyond the

nomenclatures of Anglophone and Francophone lie numerous ethnocultural rivalries. Prominent among these is the case of the Sawa movement of 1996, in which the Sawa, an ethnic group from the coastal region of Cameroon, protested against what they perceived as the hegemonic intentions of the Bamileke, an ethnic group from the Grassfields region.²² Another example is the tension between the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Anglophone Cameroon, illustrated by the use of the derogatory expression “come-no-goes” (referring to a disease that leads to scabbing, curable only with difficulty) by the population of the Southwest Region to describe economic migrants from the Northwest.²³

These two examples speak to realities of ethnic jingoism, compounded by the formation of ethnic militias, in postcolonial Cameroon. The fact that the Sawa–Bamileke example involves intra-Francophone ethnic groups, while the Northwest–Southwest conflict involves intra-Anglophone ones, is significant as it reveals the fluidity of identity in the country. This is especially so in the Anglophone case, where the two groups will at one moment adopt a common Anglophone identity and fight together for a common cause (as in the Anglophone crises), and at another will claim different and opposing identities as Southwest and Northwest. These cases are evidence of the agency of precolonial identities in a national climate dominated by colonial identity discourses.

The use of textbooks in Cameroon varies depending on the type of school in question, whether public (governmental), denominational, or private (mission) or lay private (sole-proprietorship or limited-liability) institutions.²⁴ Prescribed textbooks lists are mostly observed in public schools, with mission schools encouraging their teachers to write their own texts and lay private schools oscillating between official and mission school textbooks.²⁵ The absence of a uniform system of textbook use has resulted in a phenomenon of pamphlet publications. These

pamphlets are makeshift textbooks written by teachers to compensate for the absence of official textbooks due to scarcity or excessive cost. They are simplified or focus on examination, and are less costly.²⁶ The World Bank reports that “the textbook to learner ratio in Cameroon is among the lowest in the world, with an average of one textbook per twelve learners, falling to one textbook per thirty learners in some regions.”²⁷ This low ratio can be attributed to the high cost of textbooks, their limited availability outside major cities, and their poor content and material quality.²⁸

It is also important to remember that textbooks in Africa are mostly colonial relics, having been designed either by Westerners or by the Western-trained local educators who controlled education in Africa after colonization.²⁹ This is the case with the textbooks analyzed in this study, where the French text is authored by Western scholars and the English text by a Western-trained Anglophone Cameroonian. This authorship has implications for the colonial nature of the textbooks and the identity representations they contain. Similarly, textbooks in Cameroon are often published by foreign publishing houses, since local publishers lack not only a backlist and the financial capital necessary to compete with multinationals, but often textbook publishing experience and basic publishing skills. For these reasons, the Cameroonian educational system and educational planners have failed to make the use of history textbooks mandatory for teachers and learners. This has led to the rise of other resources, such as makeshift textbooks or pamphlets designed by teachers to prepare students for an examination-oriented education system. Importantly, textbooks produced for use in Cameroon must adhere to the curricula and policies of the educational subsystems of the individual Anglophone and Francophone zones, each with its own language and approach to history (especially regarding the country’s reunification) and Cameroonian identity.

It is generally understood that textbooks frequently form the basis for the teaching of a subject. History textbooks in most countries remain the most powerful tool for providing people with an understanding of local and world history,³⁰ and as such constitute a significant source of pedagogical content knowledge, helping to structure the teaching and learning of history via a clear system of ideas and information. Yet while textbooks are clearly vital instructional resources, some scholars have questioned their neutrality. According to Inari Sakki, textbooks transmit not only facts, information, and knowledge, but also norms, social rules, and ideologies.³¹ Likewise, Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith have observed that textbooks seek to anchor political and societal norms.³² Seen in this way, textbooks are not merely “delivery systems of facts,” but also “the result of political, economic and cultural activities, battles, and compromises ... [that] are conceived, designed, and authored by people with real interests ... [and] are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources and power.”³³

This darker side of the role of history textbooks evokes the question of the underlying purpose of history education. If this purpose is to build a critical, active, and responsible citizen, educators may choose sensitive and controversial topics to develop critical thinking, help learners to acquire the concept of multi-perspectivity, and foster dialogue. On the other hand, if history education serves simply to transfer certain preconceived, one-sided narratives for national identity purposes, excluding other experiences, narratives, and interpretations, it fails to foster critical inquiry or historical thinking.³⁴

An example of such a role for textbooks is provided by Vivian Yenika-Agbaw’s study of the depiction of identity and citizenship in Cameroonian English literacy textbooks. In this study, Yenika-Agbaw analyzed one colonial and three postcolonial textbooks, and found that the

textbooks in the latter category reflected a Eurocentric rather than a Cameroonian or African orientation.³⁵ Lamenting the fact that recent textbooks fail to promote either a Cameroonian or African identity, the author concludes that “if texts that continue to perpetrate Eurocentrism prevail in a textbook series that stands as official curriculum, especially when written by Cameroonians, one wonders if this is the result of their Eurocentric education and/or market forces.”³⁶

A similar theme is present in South Africa where, as J. M. Du Preez has shown, apartheid-era history textbooks presented history in a way that justified Afrikaner domination and the Afrikaner struggle for self-determination,³⁷ creating a racist and nationalistic history aimed at celebrating the nation state and white-supremacist identities. South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 saw a movement away from the apartheid curriculum and towards the creation of a “new South African identity that encompasses critical consciousness, to transform South African society, and to promote democracy.”³⁸ Yet contemporary textbooks do not necessarily align with these ideals. Studies of current South African history textbooks reveal a reversal of the racial identities characteristic of the apartheid era, silences and omissions regarding the whites’ aspirations and leaders, and the deliberate presentation of new stereotypes to counter those of apartheid.³⁹ This evidence of role reversal reinforces the view of textbooks (and history textbooks in particular) as political and ideological weapons at the service of the authorities.

Similar to the Cameroonian and South African experiences is that of Kenya. Kenyan school textbooks have been shown to contain nationalist propaganda aimed at perpetuating the concept of “us” versus “the other” in their representations of Somalis (whether refugees or naturalized citizens) in Kenya. Kim Foulds has investigated the historical and current status of

Somalis in Kenya to determine how the Kenyan curriculum positions the conflict within the classroom.⁴⁰ Foulds's study revealed that Kenyan textbooks reflect a government policy of historical revisionism toward Somali refugees which aims "to position Kenya as a victim of regional instability rather than a contributor to that insecurity,"⁴¹ and thus to exonerate Kenya from any possible responsibility for the instability in the region, by promoting a national narrative that views Somalis as a problem and a security threat.

Since textbooks can only present a certain amount of content, the question of what constitutes legitimate programmatic curriculum knowledge will always be open to debate. Because textbooks seek to enforce and reinforce cultural homogeneity and promote shared attitudes and historical memories, their production necessarily involves a struggle over the manufacture and control of public memory.⁴² In this process, textbooks have been seen as vehicles for reinforcing dominant cultural forms and encouraging a view of history as a collection of agreed-upon facts that need to be learned, rather than a dynamic process of understanding.

The power of textbook writers and producers remains contentious when one considers the generally watertight nature of the process preceding the publication of textbooks in most countries. Textbook writers are often bound by strict government production and publication policies that usually leave them with little room for maneuvering. In Cameroon, the textbooks to be used in Anglophone and Francophone secondary schools are selected each year by a National Textbook Commission instituted by the Ministry of Secondary Education.⁴³ However, it should be noted that not all textbook writers are prepared to comply with the dictates of the government. Some, including in Cameroon,⁴⁴ have resorted to self-publishing as a means of maintaining control over content and to avoid government interference.⁴⁵ Thus, although textbook writers do

have some agency regarding content, they remain vulnerable to government interference in the form of the official textbook list.

While political power in Cameroon has shifted over the years from Germany to Britain and France, and then, via independence and reunification, to a Francophone-dominated federal framework, no studies of Cameroonian history textbooks have yet been conducted with a view to understanding their mechanisms of identity construction. It is thus worthwhile to analyze the Cameroonian history textbook in the context of identity, especially as it relates to the most significant event in contemporary Cameroonian history—the country’s reunification.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study rooted in the interpretivist paradigm. It aims to explore how the selected history textbooks represent issues of identity and otherness with respect to Cameroonian reunification. To this end, two history textbooks were chosen for analysis, one each from the two subsystems of education in Cameroon. While not necessarily representative of the country’s textbook landscape, both textbooks are officially approved and widely used in schools. Our second criterion for selection relates to authorship. While the Francophone textbook was authored by French scholars and produced by a French publisher, the Anglophone textbook was authored by a Cameroonian historian with a Western education. This tallies with the claim, advanced by Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, that African textbooks are mostly designed either by Westerners or Western-trained local educators.⁴⁶ It was therefore important to explore how these hybrid identities of authorship play out in the processes of identity construction reflected in the textbooks. The number of textbooks was limited to two because this is a small-scale qualitative study in which textbooks act as yardsticks for a broader phenomenon. The textbooks selected are

Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges. Vol. 2: The Colonial and Postcolonial Periods (1989), whose author is an academic historian, and *Décolonisation et problèmes de l'Afrique indépendante: Histoire classes terminales* (1991), which was written by three French historians.

The study was undertaken using qualitative content analysis, which Jan Nieuwenhuis conceptualizes as a “systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarizes message content,”⁴⁷ and which involves looking at data from various angles in order to identify textual keys that can facilitate the interpretation of the raw data. These keys are then coded into what Steve Stemler has described as a “systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories, based on explicit rules of coding.”⁴⁸ This choice was based on the premise that qualitative researchers who use written texts (such as textbooks) as sources generally avoid following a predefined protocol,⁴⁹ but rather attempt to define their themes via multiple readings, thereby delineating the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world exemplified by the textual material.

Our content analysis involved identifying appropriate verbal and visual⁵⁰ units of analysis from the relevant sections of the textbooks. These units of analysis were then coded using the content analysis construct indicators shown in Table 1 below. These methods allowed us to observe certain patterns and identify the relevant discourses.

Table 1. Content-analytical construct for the identification of historical discourses.⁵¹

Construct	Conceptualization
Backgrounding and foregrounding	Using headings and key words to emphasize certain concepts by giving them textual prominence. Foregrounding if the text is emphasized and backgrounding if the text is there but de-emphasized or minimized.
Silences	What is missing? The said and the not-said.
Agency	Sentences that convey information about power relations. Who is depicted as in power and over whom? Who is depicted as powerless and passive? Who is exerting power and why?
Gaze	What are the textbooks' authors'/creators' attitudes on reunification?
Intertextuality	How are various subtexts, such as picture labels, questions, or charts presented?
Nature of school history	What kind of school history is promoted as a result of the representations established in the genre and knowledge types?

Findings from the Anglophone Textbook

In *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges. Vol. 2: The Colonial and Postcolonial Periods*, Cameroonian reunification is foregrounded as the single most significant event in the Anglophone history of Cameroon. Reunification is presented as a moment of birth rather than of decolonization. What also clearly emerged from the analysis was that the subject was constructed as a memory discipline based on a politically orientated master narrative.

As a memory discipline, history is akin to historical knowledge, which promotes the substantive or factual recall of historical facts as historical consciousness, as opposed to a more procedural form of historical knowledge that accommodates various cognitive expressions of history (such as historical significance, sourcing, multi-perspectivity, and causality). In keeping with this memory-oriented presentation, reunification is positioned as part of a neat chronological sequence of events underpinned by the actions of “great men”—the (generally Anglophone) leaders and politicians who created federal Cameroon. Francophone historical characters and events are sidelined. Three politicians in particular dominate the representations of the process of reunification. These are Ahmadou Babatoura Ahidjo, John Ngu Foncha, and to a lesser extent Emmanuel Mbela Lifafa Enderley. These politicians played significant roles in the decolonization process of French and British Cameroons, the reunification process, and its immediate aftermath. They are presented as responsible for the negotiations with the United Nations and with the colonial masters Britain and France, for leading the reunification campaign in the British zone, and for facilitating the post-plebiscite discussions that culminated in the formal proclamation of reunification. The insinuation here is that without these great Anglophone men, reunification would not have happened.

The Anglophone textbook generally presents the events of reunification in great detail. For example, when explaining the Fouban Constitutional Conference, which brought together delegations from British and French Cameroons to negotiate the terms of reunification, the author goes so far as to mention the precise number of delegates in attendance (twenty-five from the Southern Cameroons and twelve from the Cameroon Republic) as well as the exact length of the discussions (ninety-five minutes).⁵² While the textbook presents the Fouban Conference as the main event of reunification (as reflected by the large volume of verbal and visual space

accorded to it), it also overwhelmingly represents Anglophones as victims of reunification, suggesting that they secured a bad deal at the conference and thereby strongly implying Anglophone marginalization.

The textbook does not engage with reunification in an analytical or critical manner, but rather presents it as a clear and neat national story in order to evoke a sense of Anglophone identity linked to feelings of pride and belonging. Learners are expected to memorize the events and historical characters associated with reunification using a textbook in which the written text predominates and in which images, activities, paratext, and historical sources are almost completely absent. The textbook offers no space for historical thinking, but instead presents a deeply entrenched Anglophone identity rooted in the British colonial experience, an identity which it presents as having superseded all others, whether national Cameroonian or regional West African.

Throughout the textbook, the author encourages the notion of a general Cameroonian narrative on reunification. To judge by the text, the entire story of Cameroonian reunification could be summarized as the British Cameroonians' struggle to secure an identity of their own, an identity which had been threatened in the wake of the plebiscite, which had offered them no chance of attaining independence as a sovereign country. Their political future thus depended on their willingness to become a part of French Cameroon or Nigeria. Following the plebiscite, the negotiations between French Cameroon and Southern Cameroons indicated a continuation of the latter's struggle to secure a good and sustainable status within the new union. While presenting the Anglophone delegation as having secured a bad deal at Foumban, the text strongly emphasizes the role of Anglophone politicians (both those in power and those in the opposition), traditional authority, and civil society in bringing about the political developments that

culminated in reunification. This overwhelming presence of Anglophone-related historical characters and events in the substantive knowledge content of the textbook facilitated the identification of an Anglophone identity discourse. This master narrative reflects the complexity of a postcolonial society trapped between a history depicting an identity internalized from its former colonial masters and one valorizing the identity of the former colonized state.

Findings from the Francophone Textbook

Like its Anglophone counterpart, *Décolonisation et problèmes de l'Afrique indépendante: Histoire classes terminales* (Decolonization and problems in independent Africa: History for the upper sixth year) presents history as a memory discipline based on a master narrative. As such, it contains predominantly written text and completely lacks images, paratext, activities, and historical sources. Its French-educated authors present a political history which encourages neither analytical nor critical historical thinking. Despite these similarities, the two textbooks differ radically in their focus.

The French textbook is largely silent on Cameroonian reunification. When the subject is mentioned, it is presented in relation to the Anglophone Region and as part of the Anglophone identity. Consequently, the textbook insinuates that reunification did not involve the whole of Cameroon and its citizenry but concerned only the Anglophone Region as part of the decolonization process. Reunification is used to indicate the “essential objectives” of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) upon its creation in 1955, which the textbook defines as “independence and reunification of the French and British Cameroons.”⁵³ The textbook further uses the notion of reunification to explain how Foncha’s victory over Enderley for the prime ministership of Southern Cameroons was a result of his position on reunification,

which was more popular with the electorate. Reunification is also discussed with reference to the plebiscites held in British Cameroons, the second of which, according to the textbook, “concerned the problem of attachment to Nigeria or to the Republic of Cameroon.”⁵⁴ Though not explicitly mentioned, reunification is implied here via the synonymous term “attachment.”

This silence on reunification is also characteristic of the visual text, which features two images of French Cameroonian politicians who had no links to reunification per se. Although the verbal text does mention certain politicians involved in the reunification process, no image of them is provided. It is not surprising therefore that Ahidjo, the future prime minister of French Cameroon and president of reunified Cameroon, is not represented in the visual text. This may be attributed to his participation in the reunification process, a subject which the textbook’s authors and producers appear keen to avoid. Even when they do mention Ahidjo in the verbal text, the authors are silent on his activism towards reunification, noting only that he took over from Mbida because of the latter’s reluctance to embrace the independence agenda for French Cameroon.⁵⁵

Reunification is thus presented as a minor regional historical event, not as the foundational moment of the country. Instead, and as its title implies, the textbook emphasizes decolonization and independence from France. Consequently, it focuses on the broader historical development of political parties and their leaders in both regions of Cameroon and in other French colonies in Africa that were likewise striving for independence in the 1950s and 1960s. This decolonization process is presented as having given rise to united Cameroon and is thus a key element of Cameroonian national identity. In sum, the textbook presents a broader, regional Francophone history and identity which is, however, underpinned by a powerful Francophone Cameroonian identity based on the colonial experiences of assimilation.

Discussion

Based on the above analysis, we will now attempt to understand the nature of the identities presented to Francophone and Anglophone learners in these textbooks, especially in the sections on the reunification of Cameroon. In our view, two such identities can be identified: an Anglophone identity and related nationalism discourse, and a broader Cameroonian identity and nationalism. We have seen how *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges* promotes an Anglophone version of nationalism via its presentation of the events that led to reunification. The authors seek to instill in the reader the sense of a British Cameroonian struggle for identity by attributing a greater proportional representation and agency to Anglophone Cameroonian historical characters than to their Francophone counterparts. At the same time, Anglophones are presented as collective victims of reunification. Similarly, reunification is presented as a predominantly Anglophone, rather than Cameroonian, affair. Learners are thus exposed to a distinct Anglophone identity that teaches them, firstly, to view themselves collectively as victims of reunification, and secondly, to attribute the postcolonial impasse in Cameroon to the failure of their Francophone fellow citizens to recognize reunification as the postcolonial foundational moment of their country.

The Francophone textbook, by contrast, contains no such views, but rather promotes nationalism and identity in a broader Cameroonian sense. This is demonstrated by its almost equal representation of Francophone and Anglophone individuals, events, and places relating to reunification. Nevertheless, the textbook presents reunification as primarily an Anglophone affair and as one event in the decolonization of French West Africa. In the same vein, the Anglophone Cameroonian population was but one actor in the collaborative initiatives between the people,

political parties, and tribal associations in the two Cameroons as they underwent the decolonization process.

Although both textbooks present clearly different historiographical views on reunification, they each succeed in tying the event to the respective internalized colonial identities.⁵⁶ In emphasizing these identities, the textbook authors fail to realize that the imagined “Cameroon nation” is a conglomerate of different local identities. In fact, both textbooks are silent on the local identities that existed prior to colonization and still exist in the country. By obscuring these local identities with generalized, colonially informed identities, they advance the view of present-day Cameroon as an imaginary state.

Our analysis suggests that the reason the Francophone authors emphasize a Cameroonian nationalism is that it is in the political and economic interest of the French Cameroonian majority to maintain and promote Cameroon in its present, reunified form. On the other hand, Anglophone Cameroonians, who constitute a minority, could not readily identify with French assimilation and therefore clung to reunification as a symbolic event in order to create and promote an Anglophone version of Cameroonian nationalism, in an effort to secure a more dignified status within the union and to confute purported claims of marginalization and “Frenchification,” as described above.

Consequently, it can be argued that the Cameroonian nation state, as a colonial geopolitical construct, is more imagined than real. Issues related to its creation and the identities it gave rise to are still hotly contested sixty years later. For the Anglophone minority, reunification is the key historical event, the foundational moment which solidified their identity, and it is portrayed as such. In contrast, the Francophone textbook contextualizes reunification in the bigger picture of decolonization and the subsequent assimilation process. The result is a more

inclusive national identity, but on the terms of the Francophone majority. In the process of identity creation, both textbooks use master narratives rooted in history as a memory discipline, generally based on politics.⁵⁷ In short, one can distinguish between the internalized British colonial identity in the Anglophone textbook (underpinned by a sense of historical trauma and internal colonization by the Francophone majority, which is presented as the “other”) and the more assimilationist, nationally and regionally orientated identity promoted by the Francophone textbook, which situates the Anglophone minority and its historical experience within a series of larger historical events.

As the official version of the history of its respective region, each textbook presents an uncontested master narrative couched as a memory discipline, which leaves no room for historical thinking. In the political and educational context of present-day Cameroon, these textbooks are immensely influential in shaping identities. As the only history books ordinary Cameroonians will likely ever read, they have a powerful impact on society. Frequent advice given to Raymond Nkwenti Fru as a child in Cameroon was, “You give me good facts, I will give you good marks,” implying that only a certain uncontested narrative learned directly from the textbooks would be rewarded. This educational approach has left a strong mark on both Anglophone and Francophone identities.

In light of the above, it is not difficult to draw links between the contemporary crisis in Cameroon and the all-assimilating “us/them” identity binary prevalent in both textbooks. In many ways, these textbooks reflect contemporary Cameroonian society and the way it is playing out in that they promote neither cultural homogeneity nor shared attitudes and historical memories.⁵⁸ Instead, they do the opposite.

As government-sanctioned products of educational subsystems offering compulsory, outdated, and one-sided master narratives⁵⁹ that lack a unified approach to either national history or historical thinking, the textbooks are probably a contributing factor to the current crisis. They are used to promote socially constructed Anglophone and Francophone identities as well as a fixed identity of the self.⁶⁰ While the textbooks are of course not the root cause of the contemporary crisis in Cameroon, which has deep historical roots, they are an extension of the educational subsystems they serve, and as such have rendered slogans such as “unity in diversity” or “diversity in unity,” aimed at promoting national integration in the face of multiple identities, ineffective.⁶¹ In the process, communal boundaries that were once diffuse and permeable have hardened⁶² and the historical significance of reunification (or the lack thereof) has become a clear fault line.

Conclusion

Contemporary Cameroon is plagued by conflicting contentions of identity. The subject of reunification is contested and controversial and has brought about simmering postcolonial tensions. As a result of the multifaceted nature of identity constructions in Cameroon, the antithetical representations of reunification in Anglophone and Francophone textbooks create a sense that the Cameroonian nation state as a colonial geopolitical construct is more imagined than real. This claim of an imagined community is aggravated by the realization that even the origins of the postcolonial state are contested. Moreover, Cameroonian history textbooks as official versions of history are based on uncontested master narratives that allow for almost no historical thinking. This nature of school history has a powerful impact on readers, as these narratives are the only ones most Cameroonians are likely to ever read. In this study, we saw that

the Anglophone history textbook presents a clearly defined identity that conflicts with the identity promoted by the Francophone textbook, which is oriented more toward a national, postcolonial Francophone assimilationism. Consequently, the Anglophone crises currently plaguing the country can be seen as a result of the “us versus them” approach to identity encouraged in the textbooks.

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Notes

¹ Edwin Ardener, “The Political History of Cameroon,” *The World Today* 18, no. 8 (1962): 341–350. The information about prawns is found on page 341.

² See Baljit Singh, “Politics of Identities: A Global, South Asian and Indian Perspective,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 67, no. 2 (2006): 205–220. The term “identity” is dynamic, flexible, and fluid, rather than fixed, static, or narrow. Singh argues that sameness and differences define identity, whereby sameness refers to the self of identity and difference to the other. This article applies the notion of identity as “a sense of being at one with oneself ... and at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community’s sense of being at one with its future as well as history or mythology”(p. 206). This understanding is applicable to the gamut of terms linked to identity in this article, which include identity marker, identity politics, identity discourse, identity representation, and identity crises. The conceptualization of identity is outlined in the section entitled “Relevant Literature.”

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¹⁷ Ibid., 393.

¹⁸ Andrew Mycock, “The Enduring Legacy of Empire: Post-Imperial Citizenship and National Identity(ies) in the UK,” in *Multiculturalism and Moral Conflict*, ed. Maria Dimova-Cookson and Peter Stirk (London: Routledge, 2009), 170–191.

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