

An Appraisal of Ahmadou Ahidjo's Economic bases for Dismantling the Cameroon Federation, 1961–1972

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Abstract: In barely eleven years of experimentation, the Cameroon Federation formed between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon in 1961 was dismantled by its pioneer President, Ahmadou Ahidjo, on grounds that it was a hitch to the much-desired economic development of the country. This paper attempts a diagnostic appraisal of Ahidjo's economic justifications for dismantling the Cameroon Federation. It contends that from inception, Ahidjo was aware that the union between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon would be economically onerous. It also argues that the economic and financial difficulties of West Cameroon were largely a product of the economic harmonization policies of the Federal Government. The paper further contends that the argument on the inability of West Cameroon to balance its budgets was inconsistent with the economic and financial prospects of the territory. Through a comprehensive qualitative analysis of archival materials and published documents (books and articles), the investigation reveals that, the economic justifications for dismantling the Cameroon Federation were mere machinations with a masked agenda. As an ardent centralist drawn from his background and upbringing, Ahidjo was pursuing other interests but used economic reasons as a smokescreen to terminate the federal arrangement in 1972.

Keywords: Contradictions, diagnostic appraisal, economic bases, dismantling, Cameroon Federation

I. Introduction

The existence of post-colonial governmental systems in Africa (unitary and federal) was and remains a European construct. This was in consonance with the colonial agenda which was aimed at achieving an administratively conducive and socially cohesive society, suitable enough for maximal exploitation. A typical example is Nigeria formed in 1914 by merging the two contiguous British protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria which eventually led to the establishment of a three-region federation in 1954.¹ This trend was sustained before and after independence as a cross-section of African territories established federations with their neighbors.² In 1953 for instance, the Rhodesian Federation (present-day Zambia and Malawi) was established while in 1959, Senegal and French Sudan formed the Mali Federation. Similarly, in 1952, Eritrea joined Ethiopia in a United Nations- sponsored federation while Libya and Egypt merged with Syria to establish the Federation of Arab Republics in 1972.³

Evidently, federalism in Africa was an ill-fated political endeavor. With the singular exception of Nigeria, African Federations were short-lived as the desire for centralized unitary states did not take long to gain steam

¹ Rotimi Suburu, "The Attractions and Contradictions of Ethnic Federalism: the Nigerian Experience", in *Ethnic federalism: the Ethiopian experience in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 65-89.

² Emmy Irobi, "Ethnicity and Nation Building in Contemporary Africa: A Perspective for Nonkilling", *Global Nonkilling Working Papers* 9 (2013):1.

³ Eghosa Osaghae, "Federalism and the management of Diversity in Africa", *Identity, Culture and Politics* 5, No.1&2 (2004): 171.

within the existing federations.⁴ A perfect example was the Mali Federation that collapsed before its second centenary. Similarly, the Federation of Arab Republics was barely into its fifth year when it was dissolved in 1977 while the Rhodesian Federation survived just ten years (1953-1963).⁵ Also, within five years of federal experimentation, the national Government of Uganda introduced constitutional reforms that terminated the special status of Buganda, thereby transforming the country into a complete unitary state.⁶ Similarly, in East Africa, Haile Selassie dissolved the union that was created in 1950 between Ethiopia and Eritrea and re-centralized Ethiopia in 1962. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mobutu abolished federalism in 1965, while Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi followed suit in Nigeria during his tenure in 1966.⁷

The dissolution of these Federations was hinged principally on prevailing political claims based on ethnic identity which came to be regarded as a threat to national unity and integration. Behind the desire for national unity and economic development lay the incessant quest for political power by African leaders. This desire for power was evident in the Cameroon Federation and it significantly shaped the course of events in the country between 1961 and 1972. In 1972, Ahmadou Ahidjo argued that the multi-layered nature of the federal system was too expensive for Cameroon which needed funds at the time for economic development. He also argued that, the State of West Cameroon was an obstacle to the socio-economic development of the Federation and emphasized the necessity to terminate the federal arrangement with the goal of enhancing national economic development and integration.⁸ At foresight, these justifications seem very logical with extremely lofty anticipated outcomes but in hindsight, they were untenable and hurriedly crafted machinations. To buttress this argument, the paper has been structured into three main sections. It opens with an introduction; charts the pathway to the referendum which terminated the federal arrangement and closes with an in-depth analysis of Ahidjo's economic justifications for dissolving the Cameroon Federation.

II. Pathway to the Referendum

In attempting to formulate a constitution that would bind the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon, delegates of the two territories were faced with the challenging question of a choice between unitary and a federal form of government.⁹ This was because the two territories had only about five million inhabitants, comprising of two distinct but vastly unequal units- the Southern Cameroons with about a million people and the much vaster Republic of Cameroon of some four million inhabitants.¹⁰ Even more importantly, Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon were two entities with distinct inherited colonial cultures and irreconcilable disproportions in economic development. The ideal constitution for a country of the size, population and resources as the one envisaged, was unitary. But, due to socio-economic and political divergences between the two federating entities it was only necessary to choose the federal system, in spite of its intrinsic complexities.¹¹ As argued by E.M.L. Endeley¹², "It [federal system] has the great advantage over the

⁴ See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135.

⁵ Osaghae, "Federalism and the Management of Diversity", 171.

⁶ Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha, Federalism, "Territorial Autonomy and the management of ethnic diversity in Africa: Reading the balance sheet", *L'Europe en formation* 1, No. 363(2012): 273.

⁷ Johnson Olaosebikan Aremu, "Unitary government and the challenge of political instability in Nigeria, 1966-1970", *World Scientific News* 40 (2016): 126.

⁸ NAB. Va/d(1972)2, Amadou Ahidjo: Cameroon to abandon federal structure in favour of unitary state.

⁹ National Archives Buea (NAB) File No. Vc /b/1961/1, Bamenda conference, 26th -28th June 1961.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ President Ahidjo even proffered a more adept explanation to these complexities. In his opening statement at the Foumban Conference in 1961, he stated that linguistic, administrative and economic differences did not permit them to envisage seriously and reasonably a unitary and centralized state. He argued that a confederal system on the other hand, being too loose, would not favor the close coming together and the intimate connection which was envisaged.

other [unitary system] of preventing the stunning impact of unification but to be realistic it will only act as a cushion to minimize the inevitable collision between two opposite systems”.¹³

The federal constitution was signed on September 1, 1961, by Ahmadou Ahidjo and on October 1, 1961, the federation went operational.¹⁴ Shortly after, the federation began moving speedily towards a unitary state. This was in line with the original agenda of Ahidjo who had seen the federal arrangement only as a transitory stage towards a unitary form of government. As pointed out by Ebune, “federalism was not part of the French political culture. The French political culture was inclined to the formation of unitary state with all powers concentrated at the center.... Ahidjo’s goal from the beginning was to establish a centralized system of government”.¹⁵ To actualize his dreams, Ahidjo introduced political and economic reforms that were covertly geared towards paving the way for a successful alteration of the form of state. Just about three weeks into the union, he issued Decree No. 61-DF-15 on October 20, 1961, dividing the federation into six administrative regions with West Cameroon constituting a region. Each region was administered by a Federal Inspector who was directly answerable to the Federal President.¹⁶ The appointment of these Inspectors of Administration was a disguised attempt by the Federal Government to undermine the powers of State Prime Ministers. Jean-Claude Ngoh, the Federal Inspector for the State of West Cameroon effectively executed this task as he was determined to usurp the powers of subsequent West Cameroon Prime Ministers.¹⁷

In 1962, the sterling used in West Cameroon was replaced with the *Communaute Francaise d’Afrique* (CFA) of East Cameroon. As a matter of policy, the CFA franc became the federal legal tender. This was followed by the signing and implementation of several other federal economic policies, including the replacement of the West Cameroon imperial system of weights and measures with the East Cameroon metric system in 1964.¹⁸ Although these economic policies were counter-productive in West Cameroon, nothing substantial was done by the federal government to salvage the situation since they were calculated attempts to put the West Cameroon economy on its knees.

On September 1, 1966, President Ahidjo terminated multiparty democracy in the federation and created a single national party dubbed the Cameroon National Union (CNU), thereby transforming the country into a one-party dictatorship. The creation of the CNU considerably limited elements of overt opposition against Ahidjo’s government.¹⁹ In December 1967, elections were held to the West Cameroon Assembly and the CNU- list of thirty-seven candidates was overwhelmingly voted.²⁰ This list was a challenge to A.N. Jua because it contained the names of those who had been dismissed from the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), following

¹² E.M.L. Endeley was the leader of the Cameroon People’s National Congress (CPNC), the main opposition party in Southern Cameroons. During the plebiscite of February 11, 1961, the CPNC campaigned for integration with Nigeria and lost to Foncha’s Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) that campaigned for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon.

¹³NAB) File No. Vc /b/1961/1.

¹⁴ NAB. File No. Ba/1967/1, on the path to a Federal Republic.

¹⁵ Joseph B. Ebune, “The Dilemma of the Federal system in West Cameroon, 1961 – 1972” *Journal of Scientific Research and Studies* 3, No.7 (2016): 134-5. See NFI Joseph LON, “The Dismantling of the Cameroon Federation in 1972: The Petroleum Factor”, *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science* 5 No. 6 (2017): 41.

¹⁶ Ebune, “The Dilemma of the Federal System in West Cameroon”, 134-35. See Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon from Federal to Unitary State: A Critical Study* (Limbe: Design House, 2004).

¹⁷Bongfen Chem-Langhee, “The Road to the Unitary State of Cameroon, 1959-1972”, *Series Sciences Humaines* 1 No. 1& 2(1990):14.

¹⁸Anthony Ndi, *Southern West Cameroon Revisted, 1950-1972: Unveiling Inescapable Traps*(Bamenda: Paul’s Press, 2013),187.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon Since 1800*(Limbe: Presbook, 1996) 239.

the Jua-Muna tussle.²¹ This was a murky moment for the KNDP and an indication that the days ahead were coded in uncertainty.

In February 1968, Ahidjo replaced A.N. Jua with S.T. Muna as Prime Minister of West Cameroon. Jua's demise was linked to financial and political scandals in the State of West Cameroon and most importantly, his determination to preserve the federation by ensuring a strict application of the terms of the federal constitution.²² During A.N. Jua's tenure as Prime Minister, there were high sounding rumors in West Cameroon pointing to an underground ploy by Ahidjo to terminate the federal system.²³ Reacting to these rumors, Jua reassured the West Cameroonian population that no such thing will happen. He reminded the people that West and East Cameroonians were from distinct backgrounds and that West Cameroonians had voted for reunification because of the conviction that the union would be of a federal character.²⁴ Ahidjo was rather opposed to Jua's speech as he speedily retorted, warning that West Cameroonians voted for reunification and not for a system of government or form of state.²⁵ Falso argues that, the appointment of Muna was done in contravention of Article 9 of the Federal Constitution because Ahidjo did not seek the approval of the West Cameroon Assembly.²⁶

In 1970, presidential elections were organized in Cameroon. On the eve of the elections, Ahidjo substituted his Vice President, J.N. Foncha with S.T. Muna as his running mate. With this appointment, Muna therefore became Vice-President of the Federation and doubled as Prime Minister of West Cameroon. The advent of Muna to power, an individual who was ready to implement Ahidjo's policies without questioning, gave Ahidjo the poise that the time was right to execute the master plan- the referendum.²⁷ On May 6, 1972, Ahidjo informed an emergency session of the Federal National Assembly of his intension to ask Cameroonians whether they would like to replace the federal system with a unitary state.²⁸ He cited the need to promote economic development and the inability of West Cameroon to balance its budgets as some of his economic justifications. Based on the strength of his arguments, Ahidjo's request was given maximum support by the Federal Assembly.

On May 20, 1972, Cameroonians were asked to vote "Yes or "No" to the following question:

Do you approve, with a view of consolidating national unity and accelerating the economic, social and cultural development of the nation, the draft constitution submitted to the people of Cameroon and instituting a Republic one and indivisible, to be styled the United Republic of Cameroon?²⁹

²¹Ibid., 243. The only supporter of Muna whose name did not feature in the list was John Tataw who had regained admission into the KNDP.

²² George Atem, *How unified is the Republic of Cameroon? The unification of the institutions of the republic of Cameroon since 1961* (NP: Anucam, 2012), 69.

²³ Frank M. Stark, "Federalism in Cameroon: The Shadow and the Reality" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10, No. 3 (1976): 436.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Piet Konings, "The Anglophone Struggle for Federalism in Cameroon", in *federalism and decentralization in Africa: the multicultural challenge*, ed. L.R. Bastia and J. Ibrahim (Fribourg: institute du federalism, 1999), 298.

²⁶ V.G Falso, *Cameroon history for secondary schools and colleges: from prehistoric times to the twenty-first century* (Kumbo: Team Work Press, 2017), 338. The Federal Constitution gave the Federal President the prerogative to appoint State Prime Ministers but only after consultation with the State Assembly. In this case, the West Cameroon Assembly was simply disregarded.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Leonide Awah, "Leadership and State-building in Post-Colonial Africa: The Case of Cameroon", *Leadership and Developing Societies* 3, No1 (ny) :80., Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, No.2 (1997): 210. See NAB. File No. Va/d/1972/2, Amadou Ahidjo: Cameroon to abandon Federal structure in favor of Unitary State.

²⁹ T. Eyongetah and R. Brain, *A History of the Cameroon* (Burnt Hill: Longman Group Limited, 1974), 177., Chem-Langhëë, 16., Ngoh, Abrogation of federalism in Cameroon 1972, 28. See also Godwin Moye Bongyu,

Decree No. 72/DF/255 was also signed by President Ahidjo on May 12, 1972. This Decree fixed the composition of the Commission responsible for the final counting of the referendum votes. The decree appointed the President of the Federal Court of Justice as chairperson and he was to be assisted by H.N. Elangwe, Andre Fouda, Moussa Yaya and Enoch Kwayeb.³⁰The rules and regulations to guide the elections were also made known to the public. After the referendum campaigns, on May 20, 1972, Cameroonian electorates went to the polls and 3.326.280 of them voted “Yes” while an infinitesimal number of 176 voted “No”, giving an overwhelming approval of 99.9%.³¹

III. The Machinations of Ahidjo’s Economic Bases for Dismantling the Cameroon Federation

According to President Ahidjo, the decision to dismantle the federal system was simply to reduce expenditures. He argued that the system was too expensive and disadvantageous as it drained the country’s coffers of billions of CFA francs which could have been used for socio-economic development.³² This was because the system made room for three governments(Federal, East, and West Cameroon Governments), and four assemblies (Federal Assembly, East Cameroon Assembly, West Cameroon Assembly, and the West Cameroon House of Chiefs) plus several overlapping services existing at the State and federal levels.³³Due to the financial entanglements that characterized the federal system, a unitary system was considered by Ahidjo as a cost-saving mechanism and therefore, economically cheaper to maintain than multiple layers of authority which federalism represented. Indeed, this argument seems very logical at foresight. Undoubtedly, a unitary system has the propensity to streamline the cost of governance by eliminating redundant regional assemblies thereby freeing up resources that can be redirected towards economic development.³⁴

Prior to Ahidjo’s proposition, foreign experts and economic planners had raised concerns as to why Cameroon, a country of only about five million inhabitants with limited resources would choose to maintain one Federal and two State governments. They argued that several services were unnecessarily duplicated leading to unbearable expenses. To them, there were several advantages to be obtained with the centralization of certain services. They also proposed the establishment of a central government with boundless powers.³⁵ The observation made by these experts was however, ill-received by the West Cameroon authorities who responded as follows:

Even federations without strong central governments have obtained great prosperity. Switzerland, a small country which grants its 22 “cantons” nearly sovereign rights was 100 years ago one of the poorest countries of Europe. It enjoys today with the same constitution, big prosperity. The Dutch Republic started around 1580 as a very loose confederation of seven very poor provinces and was 50 years later one of the richest countries of the world. One of the best examples is the United States which allows its States in accordance with its constitution of 1789 their own State governments. It has to be realized that the United States when it was formed

Democracy in Cameroon during the monolithic period: A contradiction, CJDHR 2, No. 2(2008): 9. File no. Vc/1972/1, referendum., V.J. Ngoh, *Abrogation of federalism in Cameroon 1972: A historical Analysis*(Limbe Design House, 2019), 28., NAB. File No. Va/d(1972)1, Referendum speeches by West Cameroon politicians.

³⁰ NAB. File No.VC/1972/1, Referendum.

³¹V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-present(2018): the history of a people*(Limbe: Design House, 2019) 266., Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools*, 356.

³² Ibid.,173. See Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, 173.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴Aremu, “Unitary Government and the Challenge of Political Instability”, 127.

³⁵ NAB. File No. O/ba 1964, Harmonization of the Economic systems of East and West Cameroon.

was a very poor country.... Today the United States is the richest country of the world.³⁶

The remarks of the foreign experts and economic planners are a glaring indication that the complexities involved in Cameroon's governmental system were not exclusively the concern of Ahidjo. Even foreign economic experts were fast to identify federalism as an unfavorable model for Cameroon. Though the West Cameroon authorities exacerbated a moderate attitude towards the proposition of these economic planners and foreign experts, Ahidjo explicitly and logically maintained that the federal framework entertained by Cameroon was not healthy to put the country on the desired rails of economic development. However, in retrospection, this argument may be considered untenable. Federal and unitary forms of government have their inherent peculiarities. The question worth asking is, does a unitary system guarantee economic development? This concern is summed up in the response of Chem-Langhee to the 1972 referendum as follows:

It was politically unwise and unsafe to hold and express views different from those of the President on any issue,...as no one raised the question as to whether a unitary system is a prerequisite for... national economic, social, political and cultural development or would result in such conditions.³⁷

From the above submission of Chem-Langhee, it is evident that a unitary system of government does not categorically guarantee economic development. Besides, economic consideration was not the central defining motivation behind the adoption of a federal model in most federations. Rather, federalism was seen basically as a palliative to avoid ethnic conflicts, accommodate socio-economic divergences and enhance territorial expansion and security. The United States of America for instance, adopted federalism due to disparities in socio-economic realities between the North and the South in the slave trade era. The economies and legal structures of the Southern States were hinged on the practice of slavery. Prohibiting slavery at the national level would have negatively impacted those states. The representatives of the slave-owning states then suggested the preservation of state sovereignties as a way of safeguarding their economies.³⁸

In Germany, the need to avoid tyranny was central in the adoption of federalism.³⁹ In Canada, the fundamental basis for federalism was and remains the need to reconcile, balance and accommodate diversity. Also, the union was meant to facilitate territorial expansion and strengthen national defense.⁴⁰ Belgium, between 1970 and 1993, evolved into a more federal structure because of the multilingual nature of the state with French, Dutch and German languages. It was important to accommodate these differences so that political instability and violent conflicts could be avoided. Thus, federalism was seen as a diversity management mechanism and a necessary compromise.

Evidently, the few African states that adopted federalism did not do so to achieve economic development. Rather, it was primarily intended to accommodate diversity.⁴¹ This view is vividly captured by McGinnis and Ilya Somin as follows:

The principal objective against which federalism is assessed in Africa is not the achievement of democratic government, individual liberty or economic prosperity, but the maintenance of territorial integrity and the accommodation of ethno-national and religious diversity. Democratic government, respect for

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Chem-Langhëë, 16-17.

³⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "Every Man and Everybody of Men on Earth, possess the Right of Self-government", in *An Outline of American History*, ed. Howard Cincotta (Npp: United States Information Agency, 1994).87-92.

³⁹ Rolf H.W Theen and Frank L. Wilson, *Comparative Politics: An introduction to seven countries*(New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992),192-195.

⁴⁰www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca, federalism in Canada, assessed July 10, 2022.

⁴¹ Francis N. Deng, "Ethnicity: An African predicament", *The Bookings Review* 15 No. 3(1997): 28-31.

human rights, and economic development are dividends rather than the original objectives of federalism in Africa.⁴²

In the case of Cameroon, matters of economic development were least discussed at Fouban when drawing up the federal constitution. Rather, focus was on the accommodation of diversity. This was clearly reflected in the speeches of Ahidjo and Foncha. Ahidjo for instance, remarked that, he and Foncha had agreed to a federal system of government because of “visible linguistic, administrative and economic divergences between the two States”. To this, Foncha added that, they proposed a form of government “which would keep the two cultures in the areas where they operate and blend them in the center”.⁴³ The union was indeed a fusion of two territories, distinct in culture and economic development. The Republic of Cameroon was far larger in size and population and economically more advanced than the Southern Cameroons.⁴⁴ Besides, the two territories had been administered separately for over forty-five years. During this period, they adopted different colonial cultures from their respective administering powers thus making the adoption of federalism a necessary compromise.

The abysmal economic performance of the State of West Cameroon was also mentioned by Ahidjo as one of his justifications for terminating the federal system. He pointed out that the State of West Cameroon was a burden to the federation because on several occasions, it failed to balance its budgets although most services had been placed under the Federal Government. In his words:

It will be seen that although most services have been federalized, the budget of the State of West Cameroon is still experiencing difficulties in spite of a balancing subsidy from the federation totaling more than 2000 million francs CFA, that is to say an amount equivalent to approximately three-quarters of the budget.⁴⁵

Uncontestably, the economy of West Cameroon was replete with severe economic and financial distresses. It was unsatisfactory and constituted an issue of considerable concern to both the West Cameroon and Federal Governments. The economic life of the State was stagnant, while the cost of living continued to skyrocket.⁴⁶ Investment in the territory was very low and from 1962 to 1972, the Federal Government made huge financial donations to the State of West Cameroon which accounted for about two-thirds of the territory’s recurrent budget. For instance, in the middle of 1962 and 1963, West Cameroon received 1,150,000,000 francs CFA from the Federal Government while, in 1963 and 1964, the amount stood at 1,270,000,000 francs CFA. This represented a total increase of 1200,000,000 francs CFA. Between 1968 and 1969, the amount increased to 1.600,000,000 francs CFA out of a total of 2,818,935000 francs CFA (See table 1 for details on government subventions to the State of West Cameroon).⁴⁷

Table 1: Federal Government Subvention of the State of West Cameroon and East Cameroon, 1962/63-1970/71(in millions of francs CFA)

Year	West Cameroon	% Of State Budget	East Cameroon	% of State Budget
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⁴² John McGinnis and Ilya Somin, “Federalism vs. States’ Rights: A Defense of Judicial Review in a Federal System, *Northwestern University School of Law Public Law and Legal Theory Papers* 9 (2004):1.

⁴³ Ebune, “The Dilemma of the Federal System”,134.

⁴⁴ British rule was a period of neglect, and this, coupled with the influx of numerous Nigerians, caused great resentment in Southern Cameroons. At independence, French Cameroun had a much higher Gross Domestic Product, higher education levels, better health care, and better infrastructure than British Cameroons.

⁴⁵ Cameroon News, 19 May 1972, p.2. Quoted in Eyongetah and Brain, *A History of the Cameroon*, 177. See also Ngoh, *Abrogation of Federalism in Cameroon.*, NAB. Va/d(1972)2, Amadou Ahidjo: Cameroon to abandon federal structure in favour of unitary state.

⁴⁶ NAB. File No. Qb (1965)1, The state of west Cameroon economy.

⁴⁷Thomas Ngomba Ekali, “The Federal System in West and East Cameroon” in *Cameroon: from federal to unitary state, 1961-1972.* ed. V.J. Ngoh(Limbe: Design House, 2004), 98.

1962/63	1,150	57.0	283	3.9
1963/64	1,270	68.5	890	23.5
1964/65	1440	55.0	1,371	19.0
1965/66	1,350	51.5	1,285	14.0
1966/67	1,950	70.0	1,280	10.0
1967/68	1,800	64.0	1,000	0.9
1968/69	1,640	59.0	650	6.4
1969/70	1,400	50.0	-	0
1970/71	1,700	63.0	-	0

Source: Ngoh, *Abrogation of Federalism in Cameroon 1972*, 6.

On the flip side, President Ahidjo's uneasiness with the grim economic situation in West Cameroon was undeniably esoteric because prior to the reunification of the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon, he was quite aware of the fact that the union would be burdensome to the Federation. Whether real or bogus, this had been established by the Chick Fiscal Commission Report (1954), the Phillipson Report (1959) and the Kenneth Beril Report (1960). Commissioned to investigate the economic situation of the Southern Cameroons as a separate entity, the reports indicated that the territory would not survive economically without external assistance.⁴⁸ The gloomy economic reports made the United Nations to decide on attaching the territory to a more buoyant economy to which the Southern Cameroons invariably constituted a potential burden. As Le Vine lucidly puts it,

Adding to this uncertainty is the publicly- optimistic, privately- pessimistic attitude of responsible Nigerian and Camerounian politicians. Publicly, they favor integration or unification, depending on whether they speak from a Lagos or Yaoundé rostrum. Privately, they admit that anyone who gets the Southern Cameroons acquires an economic and financial liability....⁴⁹

Torrent notes that the dingy picture about the economic viability of the Southern Cameroons kept Ahidjo himself worried about the economic and financial consequences of reunification.⁵⁰ In his analysis of the financial and economic malaise of the State of West Cameroon, Ahidjo focused more on the situation and utterly disregarded the cause. The economic and financial situation in West Cameroon between 1962 and 1972 definitely needed a more proactive and preemptive government for lasting and sustainable austerity measures. Evidently, these distresses were largely a product of the economic harmonization policies of the Federal Government. Although the project of harmonizing the economies of the two States was aligned with the central vision of furthering national integration, its implementation was characterized by certain operational prejudices.

A forthright harmonization would have meant borrowing the most cherished aspects of both systems and blending them at the Centre. Contrarily, the harmonization process was rather a furtive attempt by the Federal Government to absorb the economy of West Cameroon. This was evident in the policies instituted by the Federal Government from 1962; notably, the change of currency from sterling to franc CFA, the imposition of the East Cameroon metric system of weights and measures, strings placed on internal and external trade, the sluggishness of the Federal Government to dismantle customs barrier and above all, the absence of a defined revenue allocation formula. All these helped to cripple the economy of West Cameroon and left it enduringly at the mercy of Federal Government subventions. The policies were not only counterproductive in West Cameroon but were applied sometimes without adequate feasibility studies to mitigate undesirable outcomes. Complaints

⁴⁸Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-present (2018)*, 189. See NAB. File No. Vc/b1963/3, Tripartite conference Yaoundé, August 1961.

⁴⁹ Victor T. Le Vine, *Reluctant February Bride?* 6-7.

⁵⁰ Melanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation-building in Africa: Franco-British Relations in Cameroon at the end of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2012),31.

raised by West Cameroonian authorities against such policies were simply rebuffed by the federal authorities.⁵¹ Thus, West Cameroon had to bear the brunt from inception of the federation up to 1972, when it was finally dissolved.⁵² Hence, capitalizing on the financial difficulties of West Cameroon to argue for the dissolution of the Federal system was quite specious because West Cameroon was merely a victim of an artificial problem created by the Federal Government which could have been remedied.

Aside the fact that Ahidjo contributed to high degrees in the economic and financial malaise in West Cameroon, his argument on the inability of West Cameroon to balance its budgets was inconsistent with the economic and financial prospects of the territory. By 1972 when the referendum was announced, commercial quantities of crude oil had already been discovered in the State of West Cameroon. Reports issued by Dr. E. Ruth, the Economic Advisor to the State of West Cameroon enumerated the implications of the mining of crude oil in West Cameroon as follows:

Needless to stress the overwhelming importance of oil for West Cameroon especially and the Federation as a whole. According to the quantities of oil found, it could render the [State of West] Cameroon economically independent within few years. It would bring about full employment of the whole labor force in West Cameroon. The profits yielded by the petroleum industry could finance agricultural and industrial development and the setting up of a petro-chemical industry.⁵³

Dr. Ruth then proposed that, the Government of West Cameroon should be a partner in any commercial and mining venture relating to crude oil mined in its territory or continental shelf apart from the taxes and royalties, part of which he insisted, must be channeled back to the Federated State of West Cameroon.⁵⁴ From the report and propositions of Dr. Ruth, it is evident that the exploitation and marketing of crude oil was capable of offsetting the financial status of West Cameroon if the revenues were prudently utilized; meaning that the State of West Cameroon would no longer be a “burden” to the Federal Government.⁵⁵ Capitalizing on the inability of the State to balance its budgets as a justification for dismantling the federation in 1972 was therefore, a total display of double standards.

Ahidjo was rather apprehensive about the attitude and reactions of West Cameroonians with regards to the positive signs of crude oil in that State. Though crude oil was a federal affair⁵⁶, negotiations were definitely going to be made with West Cameroonians on the percentage of revenues to be sent to the State as royalties. West Cameroonians were determined to secure the most favorable deal by resisting standards lower than desirable. Evidences of the protective and defensive nature of West Cameroonian authorities abound. Prior to the enactment of the Federal Law on Mining in April 1964, Prime Minister J.N. Foncha had on February 3,

⁵¹A glaring example was the Federal decree on frontier trade with Nigeria. For details on the contribution of the Federal Government to the economic woes of West Cameroon between 1962 and 1972 see Valantine Elize Monoji et. al., “West Cameroon Economic Malaise in the Cameroon Federation, 1962-1972” *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies* 9, No. 1 (2023), 32-43.

⁵²Monoji et., “West Cameroon Economic Malaise in the Cameroon Federation, 32-43.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The declaration of Dr. Ruth was based on the consideration that the crude oil revenues would be effectively managed by both the Federal and West Cameroon Governments for the common good of Cameroonians. It is true that evidences from casual observations of geo-political realities have revealed that by some reverse mechanisms, some areas with rich subsoil turn out to be poor. That the discovery of crude oil deposit was going to be the magic wand in the economic challenges of West Cameroon were mere positive predictions based on the speedy transformation that had taken place during the same period in other crude oil producing countries.

⁵⁶ See NAB. File No. Pm 579, Mineral resources West Cameroon. According to the federal constitution, mining and oil mining were the preserve of the federal government. On April 6, 1964 a federal mining law, No. 64-LF-3 was enacted establishing the mining code of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

1964, written a letter to the Federal Minister of Post, Telecommunications, Mines and Power in Yaoundé requesting an oil prospection license to be granted to an Italian to prospect for oil in West Cameroon. Foncha found this Italian agent's plans very impressive and thought that with him, delivery was assured. In the letter he noted:

After looking into the matter, I could not myself see any wisdom of two companies vying to prospect in the same place. Afterwards if oil is discovered in any part of the sea or land it is certain that it is from the same source. Two companies prospecting or tapping as such could be doing injustice to themselves as none would derive full benefit of the enterprise. I'm now inclined to recommend that the person who is ready to get into the job be given the authority. In this case, the Italian firm should be given the whole prospection authority in West Cameroon. It does seem to me from the French man's application that he would not be prepared to get in within many years to come. Already, they have a license to prospect along the coast of East Cameroon and yet for many years nothing has been done....[Even if they are awarded prospection rights in West Cameroon there is no guarantee that they will perform any better].⁵⁷

Though not explicitly discussed, it is probable that Foncha was not very comfortable with the plans to award a prospection license to the French firm ELF-SEREP-CA which had tendered its application since 1961. Foncha certainly knew that a more equitable deal could be reached with the Italian company if commercial quantities of crude oil were discovered in West Cameroon than with the French firm. Also, when on December 3, 1966, a report of an unusual substance coming out of a stream near Bota was made known to Assistant Superintendent of Police, Tambansieh by a Customs Officer, the information was passed onto the Police Headquarters in Buea by J.C. Walter, Senior Superintendent of police, Victoria, and also copied to the Prime Minister and the Federal Inspector of Administration. In reaction to this letter, the Prime Minister of West Cameroon A.N. Jua noted:

I think it will be necessary to send this information to the appropriate Federal Authorities for their investigation. It is also necessary to keep Vice-President [JN Foncha] who is in charge informed as I have a feeling that if the information went straight to the ministry; he may not be kept in the picture....⁵⁸

With the promising signs of crude oil in West Cameroon, swift measures had to be taken to ensure that West Cameroon was not robbed off its oil wealth by the Federal Government. This was evident in the letter of the Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon P.M. Effange, to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon in 1967. He posited:

I am not aware under what circumstances the companies in question are carrying out their prospecting and I have no knowledge of what benefits would accrue to West Cameroon in the event of oil being discovered in commercial quantities. My view is that these issues are extremely important; perhaps it is necessary for me to remind you that the discovery of oil transformed the impoverished and hitherto unknown desert Sheikdom of Kuwait into one of the richest countries in the world.⁵⁹

Effange called on the attention of the Prime Minister to the Nigerian experience where about 80 per cent of the royalties and other benefits accrued to the region of production. He further noted that as a result of this arrangement the Eastern Region received in 1966, a total of 14.000.000 out of a total of 17.000.000 derived from crude oil. That to him was simply because "...the allocation of revenue was firmly established in the

⁵⁷ NAB. File No. Pm579, Mineral resources West Cameroon.

⁵⁸ NAB. File No. Qk(1966)1, Mineral Oil Discovery in Bota- Victoria.

⁵⁹ NAB. File No. QK (1961)1, Exploration of Minerals Geological Survey.

constitutional instruments relating to the allocation of revenue”.⁶⁰ Quite unfortunately however, before now, West Cameroon had not been able to prevail upon the Federal Government to devise an equitable system of revenue allocation for the state in spite of the fact that for a long time, the territory had operated a tight budget and was in dire need of new sources of revenue. Attempts by Foncha to get Ahidjo design a revenue allocation scheme for the federated states were all futile. It was against this backdrop that P.M. Effange noted:

No doubt the discovery of oil in commercial quantities will be a great blessing for the entire federation; but we shall make sure that West Cameroon is not played out of the deal. I would therefore suggest that we take up the matter to the authorities in Yaoundé.⁶¹

On February 2, 1967, the Prime Minister, A.N. Jua responded favorably to Effange’s letter thus,

As to what arrangement financially will be made regarding the payment of royalties and other taxes to West Cameroon is a matter which I intend to take to the authorities in Yaoundé. I have written a very strong and clear letter to the President regarding sources of revenue, and hope to pursue this matter again with him in Yaoundé when I consider it appropriate....⁶²

The reactions of West Cameroonians towards the crude oil facilitated the abrogation of the Federation. This was supposed to be done within the shortest time possible in order to prevent the feeling of entitlement and ownership among West Cameroonians.⁶³ Besides, Ahidjo knew that the respect and influence he commanded in West Cameroon was inextricably linked to the disastrous financial and economic difficulties in West Cameroon. The State of West Cameroon operated a regrettably feeble economy which could only survive with the help of federal subsidies. The declaration of Dr. Ruth that petroleum revenues would be enough to employ the entire West Cameroonian population meant that the State of West Cameroon would no longer depend on the Federal Government for subventions. This invariably meant, a decline or at worst, an end to the loyalty of West Cameroonians to Ahidjo. As someone with an obsessive desire for power and an inflated sense of superiority who had been groomed in a centralized system of government, Ahidjo was not ready to see this happen. Besides, he saw the federal arrangement as an encumbrance restraining his ever incessant desire for political power.⁶⁴ Thus, although pursuing other interests, he surreptitiously used economic justifications as a smokescreen to terminate the federal arrangement in 1972.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has established a diagnostic appraisal of President Ahidjo’s economic thesis for dismantling the Cameroon Federation. It sustained the view that in hindsight, the arguments were quite laudable but from available evidences, they were untenable and hurriedly crafted machinations. This revelation built on the premise that even before the union between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon was welded, Ahidjo was quite aware of the economic status of the Southern Cameroons. Therefore, it was baseless complaining. Similarly, the abysmal performance of the West Cameroon economy was partly a product of the economic harmonization policies initiated by the federal government after reunification. Frank harmonization would have meant co-opting the most productive and sustainable aspects of both economies but that was not the case. Besides, the policies were not only far from being accommodative and tailored to suit the East Cameroon

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ NAB File No. QK(1961)1, Exploration of minerals geological survey.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Joseph Lon Nfi, “The dismantling of the Cameroon Federation in 1972: the petroleum factor”, *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science* 5 No. 6(2017): 42-3.

⁶⁴ Christmas Atem Ebini, “Policy Alternatives for the Cameroon Conflicts with Views on Abolishing the Federation”(Ph.D Thesis, Walden University, 2019), 21.

economic development design but were introduced with such haste and without consultation with West Cameroonians. Basic economic principles have taught us that division of labor leads to efficiency. Since a federal system has to do with the devolution of power to sub-national- units, it creates room for efficiency and accountability. These are virtues that are uncommon in a unitary system.

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