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# **‘We Remain Their Slaves’ Voices from the Cameroon Conflict**

*A Working Paper*

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## Executive Summary

This report offers new insights into the Cameroon conflict and suggests a strategy for action. Findings stem from an empirical piece of research conducted by the Cameroon Conflict Research Group, based in the Faculty of Law, University of Oxford. The Group interviewed 32 individuals in the anglophone regions of Cameroon, from a range of backgrounds, to learn more about the causes and experiences of the conflict. The report is directly shaped by these collective voices and foreground in a socio-historical framework which stemmed from the research participants themselves – that of slavery. The anglophone regions of Cameroon were among the worst affected by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and, as this report shows, painful memories of slavery have been kept alive for anglophone populations by inequitable modern-day trade structures and continuing violent oppression. Equipped with this deeper framework, the main argument of the report is that the root cause of the conflict is socioeconomic inequality, for which multiple international actors, as well as the Cameroon government, are responsible. Accordingly, peaceful resolution requires multilateral efforts from all responsible parties, some of whom are named within.

The report introduction provides a fuller account of the main argument. After a brief summary of the research methods, we explore the context of slavery as it relates to Cameroon and its relationships with international actors. The report then develops over the course of three chapters. Chapter 1 presents first-hand accounts of life inside the conflict, showing how inequality is a chief cause, and is further exacerbated by the conflict. Additional first-hand accounts of the conflict are presented in Chapter 2, revealing the stark levels of violence in which anglophone communities live. Advancing beyond a descriptive level, the purpose of Chapter 2 is to show the error of drawing moral equivallance between the violent acts of the Cameroon state and the oppositional (Ambazonian) forces. Interviewee experiences presented in the report show that the crimes committed by the Cameroon government are of a special kind and must be condemned on their own terms, without qualification and comparison. Critically, the Cameroon government is not the only party implicated in crimes committed by state armed forces: Chapter 3 reveals a whole host of nation states, international institutions, and private actors involved in financially supporting the Cameroon government and training military forces who have committed criminal atrocities. Finally, informed by the suggestions of interviewees, we present routes to peace in the conclusion.

As a result of the research, the following actions are recommended:

1. For commentators to afford greater attention to the crimes committed by the Cameroon government and for a spotlight to be shone on international partners who have contributed to the accumulation of state power that has made these crimes possible.
2. For commentators and state representatives to avoid adopting a language of moral equivalence, which lends legitimacy to the Biya administration by failing to condemn in absolute terms the atrocities of state security forces. While violent crimes have been committed by multiple parties, differences of power must be heeded.
3. For nation states and other international parties to act multilaterally and place concerted pressure on the Cameroon government to end the violence, whether through trade sanctions, aid cuts, or other means.
4. For the international community to facilitate true dialogue, convened by an independent arbitrator, and to monitor the implementation of settlements reached. Representatives from disadvantaged communities should be invited to participate.
5. For representatives of nation states and other international agencies to avoid proclaiming whether a given option (e.g., secession) is non-negotiable – local stakeholders must have control of the available negotiating positions.

## Introduction: ‘We Remain Their Slaves’

[T]he international community must not abandon us – human rights here will be wiped out. It’s urgent, and it’s getting worse. I noticed from the day this crisis started, it has only been on an increase; the suffering, the pain, has only been on an increase. If something’s not done, we don’t know. We have no power of our own. I’ve seen some from the international community but it’s not enough.<sup>1</sup>

Violence has torn through the anglophone regions of Cameroon since 2016. Despite repeated reports of massacres, and recurrent images shown of children and parents in shared graves, the international response has been conspicuously limited.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the efforts of a handful of humanitarian organisations and journalists, the conflict and loss of lives in Cameroon have been largely overlooked.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the lack of attention relates to the false assumption that this is a conflict internal to Cameroon, and ought to be resolved only from within. From this perspective, appeals made by anglophone Cameroonians for the international community to respond to the violence could be misinterpreted as a sign of dependency on international actors and a lack of internal agency. However, the deeper examination of these issues which we undertake here reveals that petitions for international intervention are in fact calls for the international community to take responsibility for the violence its members have co-created.

In forming this report, we sought chiefly to understand the conflict in Cameroon from the perspectives of those most directly affected by it – individuals on the ground in the conflict regions. Accordingly, we designed an empirical study and conducted in-depth interviews with 32 civilians from a range of backgrounds and locations in the anglophone North-West and South-West regions. The experiences and perspectives of our research participants, which helped shape our research, have illuminated the causes of the conflict and traced some pathways towards its resolution.

Contrary to first impressions, this is not simply a cultural conflict between the francophone state and minority anglophone peoples. More than this, the Cameroon conflict is about socioeconomic marginalisation, unequal access to resources and opportunities, and gross levels of power imbalance. Relatedly, our research participants’ accounts reveal that this is also not essentially a conflict between two groups – the francophone state of Cameroon, *La République*, and the anglophone Ambazonian (Amba) oppositional forces. Rather, it is a conflict that involves a much wider set of stakeholders who have markedly differential levels of power. For instance, it seems that the oppositional Amba forces represent underprivileged communities in Cameroon and are viewed as defenders by many of our research participants. Conversely, none of our research participants described the Cameroon state as representing them or their interests, instead tending to perceive *La République* and its military forces as aggressors. Indeed, a deeper look reveals that

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<sup>1</sup> Nina, 38 years of age, teacher by profession. Note, all names used in this report are pseudonyms; names and identifying features have been changed to avoid recognition.

<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian Refugee Council judges the Cameroon conflict as the most neglected displacement crisis in the world. See NRC (2019) ‘Cameroon tops list of most neglected crises’. Retrieved 01/04/2020 from: <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/june/cameroon-tops-list-of-most-neglected-crises/>.

<sup>3</sup> Certain organisations have been commendably active, particularly Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and some UN human rights groups.

the Cameroon state may operate more for the benefit of internal elites and external actors than for citizens within.

International governments, institutions, and private agents are intricately connected to the functioning of the Cameroon state and accordingly share responsibility for the crimes it commits. As we document in Chapter 3, Cameroonian armed security forces, frequently reported to be mass executing and torturing anglophones and other civilians,<sup>4</sup> have received enormous amounts of funding, equipment, and training from France, the United States, and Israel,<sup>5</sup> and to a lesser extent Germany and China. Moreover, there is substantial international control of Cameroon's resources: for example, operations by British companies such as New Age, BowLeven, and Victoria Oil & Gas; the Anglo-French company, Perenco; the Chinese Addax Petroleum Cameroon Company (invested through state-owned means); and US funders such as Sculptor Capital/Och Ziff have significant ownership of oil and gas interests. As we examine in more detail, the contentious extraction of oil from an anglophone area is also driven by international actors – especially the British actors abovementioned and their US hedge fund backer. Such unfair and unequal distribution of Cameroon's natural resources, especially in the anglophone regions, is not unnoticed by the local populations, and in Chapter 1 we argue that the stark inequality that foreign investment practices generate is one central cause of the conflict.

Indeed, inequality and difference permeate this conflict; they do not only characterise the cause of the conflict, but also its very nature. When we reflect on the power that lies behind parties to the conflict, it becomes apparent that to treat them as equal is erroneous. The Cameroon state and its abundant international support cannot be equated to the Amba forces that primarily rely on old hunting rifles and trickling income from diaspora and local illicit sources.<sup>6</sup> Despite these glaring differences, numerous international actors have framed the conflict as principally involving 'wrongs committed on both sides'.<sup>7</sup> At one level of analysis, it is true that all militant parties stand accused of committing crimes against humanity, which are undoubtedly wrong and disturbing; yet, as we illustrate in Chapter 2, a deeper look shows these crimes are not the same. For one, the sheer amount of killing and injury caused by the state forces far outweighs direct injury caused by Amba forces.<sup>8</sup> For another, our research indicates that the underlying rationales behind these acts of violence differ significantly: ostensibly, the state operates on the attack and has targeted entire

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<sup>4</sup> Willis, R., McAulay, J., Ndeunyema, N., Angove, J. (2019). 'Human Rights Abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: A Submission of Evidence to UK Parliament'. Retrieved 05/04/2020 from <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/human-rights-abuses-in-the-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-recommendations-for-action/>; Amnesty International. (2017). 'A turn for the worse: Violence and Human rights abuses in Cameroon'. Retrieved 16/10/2019 from <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR1784812018ENGLISH.PDF>; B.B.C. News Africa. (2018). 'Cameroon Burning: The Unseen War – Full Documentary – BBC Africa Eye'. Retrieved 16/10/2019 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct\\_SLnAGDuM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct_SLnAGDuM).

<sup>5</sup> In this report, we do not investigate the links between Israel and the Cameroon state, except part of the relationship between the elite unit of the state security forces and Israeli training. That said, there is certainly much more to be written about this connection.

<sup>6</sup> Freudenthal, E. (2018b). 'Cameroon's anglophone war, part 2: Inside the separatist conflict'. *The New Humanitarian* (formerly IRIN). Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2018/08/02/cameroon-s-anglophone-war-part-2-inside-separatist-conflict>.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2 of this report.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

anglophone communities, whereas the Amba are purported to act in defence and generally target state actors or specific civilians who fail (in their eyes) to show solidarity with the Ambazonian cause (as they construe it). On account of these differences, we urge for crimes committed by the Cameroon state, which are of disproportionate force, duration, effect, and reach, to be afforded special and separate treatment: state-sponsored crimes should be condemned on their own terms, without qualification and comparison.

On our view, the claim that ‘wrongs have been committed on both sides’ is deployed less as a statement of truth and more as a strategic device that can justify non-intervention and shield from view the role of international actors and their corresponding responsibility. Assertions of this nature by representatives of important nation states permit the focus to shift away from crimes of the Cameroon state. Worse, they provide a sheen of legitimacy which the state may exploit to justify their major atrocities, as they have already done, e.g., by pointing to Amba fighters allegedly among casualties of massacres (see Chapter 2 for examples). Moreover, platitudes of the ‘both sides’ variety risk perpetuating the idea the Cameroon conflict is simply an internal dispute between two African feuding groups, which the international community may permissibly only condemn from the sidelines. However, in the course of this report, it becomes clear that the Cameroon conflict is jointly funded and co-produced by a range of international actors who must be recognised as major parties to it. Due to their extensive dealings with the Cameroon state, certain nations, international institutions, and private companies are also implicated in the crimes of *La République* and have a pressing duty to respond.

Our chief recommendation, then, is for the assortment of international actors with past and ongoing relationships with the state of Cameroon to take multilateral action to end the state violence. Unilateral approaches – from the issuance of diplomatic declarations (e.g. UK, France, and the UN), attempts to facilitate dialogue (e.g. Switzerland), and trade sanctions (e.g. US) – have had a minimal impact to date. While in and of themselves these responses are sound, instead of being individually trialled, they must now be pursued as joint endeavours. Accordingly, we call on international actors who are gaining significant economic benefits from Cameroon, such as those named in Chapter 3 of this paper, to form a coalition and strategize on how to collectively hold the Cameroon government to account. Ideally, this would involve non-violent means without boots on the ground, such as through trade sanctions, and would ultimately lead to meaningful and fair dialogue between the main stakeholders, in the presence of independent arbitrators. And since inequality is so central to the cause of the Cameroon conflict, representatives of underprivileged groups should have a place at the negotiation table.

Having outlined the main argument of the paper, in the remainder of the Introduction we further detail the framework of the study. After providing a brief overview of the research methods, we expand on the research context through the concept of slavery, which was unexpectedly invoked by almost half of our research participants to explain their current situation. For those unfamiliar with the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the prevailing influence it has on structural inequality in the present day, these references to slavery might be dismissed as figurative, exaggerated, or even hyperbolic. However, when we give thought to the historic and present-day structures that operate within Cameroon, and between the Cameroon state and international

actors, the analogy of slavery is astute. At the close of the introduction, we offer five specific recommendations that our analysis has led us towards.

## Research Methods

Our research team is based in the Faculty of Law, University of Oxford. We designed an empirical study to learn about the causes of the Cameroon conflict and to find potential solutions for peace; reviewed by the Central University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford, reference (R67677/RE001). The research team conducted 32 in-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders in the North-West (n=26) and South-West (n=6) regions. Participants include men (n=24) and women (n=8), between the ages of 24 and 88, from a range of village (n=19) and urban (n=13) backgrounds. In addition to including a range of communities in the study, we accessed research participants through six different gatekeepers with the aim of increasing the diversity of the sample. In order to ensure anonymity, all identifying information of research participants has been changed, pseudonyms are employed throughout, and oral recordings have since been deleted.

Each interview lasted up to an hour and was audio recorded in the first instance. Most of the interviews were conducted over an encrypted communications application, in either pidgin (n=18) or English (n=14), depending on interviewee preference.<sup>9</sup> In order to learn more about the conflict from the perspective of those living through it, we asked broad and open-ended questions so that themes could emerge directly from the collective experiences of research participants. Questions included the following: ‘What do you think about the conflict?’, ‘How have you been affected by it?’, ‘Who are the main parties in this conflict?’, ‘What are the main issues of the conflict?’, and ‘What can be done to resolve the conflict?’. The interviews were translated (when required) and transcribed within the team. Once transcribed, the dataset was coded using software for qualitative analysis.<sup>10</sup> The core themes identified from the coding have been used to shape the report and are further developed through the theoretical lens of socioeconomic inequality.<sup>11</sup>

As with all research, there are limits to the study. The research site itself being a conflict setting, we mostly relied on remote forms of communication, and the study has been completed in a relatively short period of time (three months). There is certainly scope and need for longer-term research to be conducted on the ground in Cameroon. Moreover, there are groups not represented in this report who warrant consideration in future studies. For example, Mbororo communities in Cameroon are heavily affected by the conflict,<sup>12</sup> and it would be valuable to learn about civilian

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that while throughout this report we refer to those in the North-West and South-West as anglophone people, many speak predominantly pidgin English, or both, not to mention any of the hundreds of native African languages to be found in these regions.

<sup>10</sup> Nvivo – see: <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>.

<sup>11</sup> The data has benefited from theory developed by Willis, R. (forthcoming). *A Precarious Life: Understanding Class, Race, and Conflict in a Deindustrialised Town*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

<sup>12</sup> For forthcoming work in this area, see Michaela Pelican: <https://www.michaela-pelican.com/>.



experiences in francophone regions too.<sup>13</sup> Other possible stakeholders include refugees, individuals in the diaspora, Cameroon state actors, members of the oppositional Amba movement, and international actors, among others. Notwithstanding the importance of wider representation, civilians from the anglophone regions included in this study have been exposed to the violence of the conflict on an enduring and unparalleled basis. Having risked their lives to speak with us, their experiences deserve to be heard.

## Research Context: From the Slave Trade to the Oil Trade

The slave trade was one of those historical phenomena – not unlike the Holocaust – which is extremely difficult to describe in its full enormity. How to capture the sufferings of millions of Africans caught in its pernicious web has eluded most historians.<sup>14</sup>

An unexpected theme to emerge organically from our research was the concept of slavery used by our interviewees to describe the experiences of anglophone communities. For example, Kelvin lamented the anglophone situation: ‘We are just living like slaves. But even to slaves you give food; we are not being given anything.’ Similarly, Ozias proclaimed, ‘[w]e are just slaves to La République.’ Almost half of our interviewees expressed views of this nature. In this analogy, the anglophone people are cast in the position of enslaved persons, and their figurative slave masters are the elites and military personnel of the Cameroon state. Since this theme was present across a range of our independent interviewee accounts, it is valuable to reflect on slavery as it relates to the Cameroonian context.<sup>15</sup> In agreement with our research participants, we find slavery a fitting framework to make better sense of current levels of inequality in modern-day Cameroon, which in turn seems to be fuelling the conflict.

Discussions about slavery are thought to be unusual in anglophone areas of Cameroon, despite some of those areas reportedly being key sites for the capture and enslavement of people, forced in their thousands into the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>16</sup> Before the conflict, Nicolas Argenti, who researched among the people of Oku in the North-West Region, wrote about the notable absence of slavery in communal talk, this painful part of history seemingly unspeakable: ‘So complete was the silence on this issue, despite the fact that other aspects of the past are regularly recounted in myths and stories, that it was conspicuous by its obstinate discursive absence.’<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, it may be particularly striking that our research participants, many of whom were from traditional

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<sup>13</sup> For forthcoming work on resistance among francophone populations, see Amber Murrey: <https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/staff/amurrey.html>. Further, the subsection on France in Chapter 3 of this report points to a larger pattern of state violence towards francophone resistance movements.

<sup>14</sup> Walvin, J. (1992). *Slaves and slavery: The British colonial experience*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> This analysis is in progress. The Research Group hopes to develop this theme further over the course of the research project. Recommended readings are most welcome. For more information about the Group: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/cameroon>.

<sup>16</sup> Argenti, N. (2008). *The intestines of the State: Youth, violence, and belated histories in the Cameroon Grassfields*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.



communities in areas of Cameroon hit by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, explicitly communicated their current situation in the language of slavery.

It is important to find the right depth of analysis when treating this topic. On the one hand, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was nothing new, for institutions of slavery had existed in various forms, and in different parts of the world, throughout history.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, an internal form of enslaving people was operative in Africa prior to the Portuguese arrival in the sixteenth century, when the mass global sale of African people took root. But, on the other, we must not ignore that the nature and scope of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was vastly different from anything that had been practised before, and was incomparable in nature, size, and brutality.<sup>19</sup> Several European states played a major part in the development of the slave trade and reaped significant profits during the course of three centuries (including the Dutch, French, Spanish, and Norwegians, among others). Nevertheless, it was the British (primarily the English and the Scots) who were by far the greatest drivers and benefactors of the slave trade between the mid-seventeenth and early-nineteenth centuries; Britain expanded the global trade in African peoples to enormous proportions, which generated substantial wealth for individual traders, and benefited the home nation and its settler colonies in immeasurable and continuing ways.<sup>20</sup>

When we reflect on the trans-Atlantic trade, it is crucial to consider the agency of African actors in its development, especially since Europeans were reliant on African intermediaries to supply human lives for the trade.<sup>21</sup> A significant finding recently brought to light by Toby Green in a seminal piece of work is how certain West African actors were resistant to embark on the exchange of people.<sup>22</sup> Green shows how before the seventeenth century, there were powerful empires that operated in West Africa, which held strong global trade influences, from the Akan states on the gold coast to the state of Benin. Being so powerful, these early African states were able to oppose the trade in enslaved persons for a couple of centuries. According to Green's research, Portugal and Benin had several disputes over the issue: 'the refusal to export male slaves remained Benin's royal policy right until the end of the seventeenth century'.<sup>23</sup> From a West African perspective, moreover, it seems that trading people with Europeans was viewed differently to internal institutions, in which captives were the responsibility of their captor and holders of moral value.<sup>24</sup>

The European trade in African persons eventually began in the sixteenth century, and more rapidly into the seventeenth century onwards. This was likely the result of several factors as suggested by Green, including a mini ice age, which destabilised food production; an influx of soft currencies (e.g. cloth) over the export of hard currency (e.g. gold); an increase in warfare, fuelled by the import

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<sup>18</sup> Walvin, J., *ibid.*; Rodney, W. (1966). 'African slavery and other forms of social oppression on the Upper Guinea coast in the context of the Atlantic slave-trade.' *The Journal of African History*, 7(3), 431-443.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Argenti, *ibid.* and Green, T. (2019). *A fistful of shells: West Africa from the rise of the slave trade to the age of revolution*. (UK: Penguin).

<sup>20</sup> Hall, C., Draper, N., McClelland, K., Donington, K., & Lang, R. (2014). *Legacies of British slave-ownership: Colonial slavery and the formation of Victorian Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>21</sup> Green, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1.

of new weaponry from Europe; and an increase in internal conflict, which destabilised existing social orderings and increased the potential for captives to be caught and subsequently traded. Under such strains, it was difficult for African elites to continue resisting European requests for African people, and kingdoms that took this earlier moral stance, such as Benin, collapsed. This paved the way for the emergence of new African elites who were able to capitalise on the demand for people; and, as the trade grew, traders gained ever more power and wealth.

Likewise, Argenti describes how new economic pressures changed the situation for those populating part of what became anglophone Cameroon:

Armed slave raiding in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, followed by the regular sale of slaves to the long-distance slave trade by local elite slave traders, transformed the Grassfields from a largely peaceable region in the early eighteenth century into a chaotic, unstable, violent, and dangerous place of terror from the second half of the eighteenth century well into the twentieth.<sup>25</sup>

With the exception of regional elites, the wider population of West Africa (past and present) suffered devastating effects from the trade. In addition to the violence and trauma of losing kin, the economic development bolstered in Europe and Americas by the surplus value of an enslaved person was at the same time taken from the peoples of West Africa.

Nonetheless, African resistance to enslavement was a continuing feature of the trans-Atlantic trade, from its early beginnings to the later Haitian revolution which contributed to its eventual abolition in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Paradoxically, the abolition of the slave trade then became a moral justification for European colonisation of Africa;<sup>27</sup> European intervention was argued to be necessary to eliminate slavery on the continent. Authoritarian regimes that had grown in West Africa during the rise of the slave trade were unpopular, and revolutions from subjugated communities created fertile conditions for European colonisers to take control. While the impetus for colonial rule was undoubtedly economic, colonialism was explained under the guise of a 'civilising mission'. European colonisers presented themselves as trustees who acted on behalf of colonised peoples, allegedly making productive use of Africa's natural resources until the colonised subjects became 'civilised' and capable of self-rule.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Argenti, *ibid.*, p. 55. The 'Grassfields' Argenti here mentions may be understood, more or less crudely, as including specifically the North-West region of contemporary Cameroon, or the north of the former British Southern Cameroons, as well as some of the West (francophone) region.

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent account, see James, C. L. R. (2001). *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. (UK: Penguin).

<sup>27</sup> Rudin, H. (1938). *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884–1914: A case study in modern imperialism*. (London: Jonathan Cape); Eckert, A. (1999). 'Slavery in colonial Cameroon, 1880s to 1930s'. In *Slavery and colonial rule in Africa*, ed. S. Miers & M. Klein, pp. 133–48. (London: Frank Cass); Argenti, *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> J. S. Mill, a long-time employee of the East India Company, wrote in a utilitarian vein of the gains to be had from civilising 'barbarians' through colonial means. For a strong critique of Mill, see Mehta, U. S. (1999). *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); for a good overview see Schultz, B. (2007). 'Mill and Sidgwick, Imperialism and Racism'. *Utilitas* 19, no. 1. 104–130; and for a critical discussion see Marwah, I. S. (2019). *Liberalism, Diversity and Domination: Kant, Mill and the government of Difference*. (Cambridge: CUP), esp. Ch. 5.

Cameroon has a multilayered colonial history. It was first colonised by Germany in 1884, and then divided between the French and British colonial forces in 1916 after invasion.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding France taking the majority share of Cameroon, both French and British colonial rulers introduced a full host of national institutions, which ranged from different languages, legal systems, governance structures, educational approaches, and more. While colonial policies differed between nations – for example, the French practised ‘direct rule’, and the British ‘indirect rule’ – many effects were ultimately the same; African peoples and cultures were subjugated to European rulers, and natural resources were extracted for the ultimate benefit of international traders and colonial nations.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, despite the moral pretext of abolishing the trade in persons, the practice of slavery continued within Cameroon into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, German colonial forces relied heavily on the forced labour of African peoples, which strongly echoed the institution of slavery that had supposedly been abolished.<sup>32</sup> During the centuries of the trans-Atlantic trade, enslaved persons were transported across the ocean to settler countries in order to provide the labour and intelligence required for the cultivation of newly possessed lands. During colonialism, the lands to be cultivated were no longer offshore; colonial forces now commanded control of vast areas of land within Cameroon and required internal sources of labour and intelligence to exploit those too. In order to maximise the profits of colonial controlled industrial-sized plantations, German colonisers actively encouraged the capture of persons from parts of Southern Cameroon,<sup>33</sup> and provided arms and financial incentives to elites to expedite the process. Captives were then forced to work on the plantations under elusive promises of future freedom.<sup>34</sup> Argenti describes the bleakness of the situation:

Not only was the colonial means of acquiring labor perceived by both local recruiters and recruits as a continuation of the slave trade, but the form of work itself became infamous as stories of the massive death toll of plantation laborers on the coast filtered back to the Grassfields and were related to the same genre of accounts of the transatlantic slave trade had been: as a mythical form of European cannibalism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> There were, however, missionary stations in decades prior to this point, and some interest from the British in setting up a protectorate. For simplicity, we take 1884 as the official beginning of the colonial period.

<sup>30</sup> Mamdani, M. (2018). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. (Princeton University Press); Rodney, W. (2018). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. (Verso Trade); Tharoor, S. (2018) *Inglorious Empire: what the British did to India*. (UK: Penguin).

<sup>31</sup> Weiss, H. (2000). ‘The illegal trade in slaves from German northern Cameroon to British northern Nigeria.’ *African Economic History* 28, pp. 141-197.

<sup>32</sup> Eckert, A. (1998). ‘Slavery in colonial Cameroon, 1880s to 1930s’, *Slavery and Abolition*, 19(2), 133-148; Argenti, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> In places of this report, we refer to the anglophone regions as Southern Cameroon/s, as do our interviewees, even though geographically they are western. The regions owe this title to their being former dependencies of the British empire, as opposed to the French-controlled parts. The Southern Cameroons were initially paired with the Northern Cameroons, both together as the West of Cameroon. However, the Northern Cameroons opted to join Nigeria formerly in their plebiscite.

<sup>34</sup> This is recognised as form of slavery by the United Nations. See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Slavery/SRSlavery/Pages/SRSlaveryIndex.aspx>.

<sup>35</sup> Argenti, *ibid.*, p. 99; see also Courade, G. (1982). ‘Marginalité volontaire ou imposée: Le cas des Bakweri (Kpe) du Mont Cameroun’. *Cahiers ORSTOM*, 18, 3, pp. 357-388.

While less active in its propagation, the British and French colonial forces seemingly ignored the slave labour in the plantations of Cameroon yet reaped the benefits through colonial taxation and trading policies.<sup>36</sup>

Cameroon gained independence in 1960, joined by the former British Southern Cameroons in 1961. Whereas in earlier centuries wealth was contained in the surplus value of labour, in current times, one of the most valuable resources is light crude oil, as found in anglophone Cameroon. In a material sense, trade in oil marks a significant shift from the trade in enslaved persons. However, in a structural sense, many constants remain. First, as we show in Chapter 3, access to oil and gas extraction is profitably brokered by elite actors within Cameroon for the greater benefit of international actors – this practice shares a basic shape with that in which people were taken from Cameroon by local elites for the ultimate benefit of Europeans. Second, the Southern Cameroons are once again being exploited without gaining any of the benefits; initially for their peoples, now for their minerals. And third, as with the trade in enslaved people, elite Cameroonian and international actors take the wealth, but the wider population of Cameroon, both present and future, receives nothing (or actively loses out).

There are likely other, more direct links between the profiteers of slave-ownership and those who currently control the resources of Cameroon. Tracing these links is beyond the scope of the present study, but future research might do well to consider how the development of modern-day global institutions of credit and debt are intricately tied to the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>37</sup> In the UK, for example, freedom from slavery following abolition required former enslaved persons to continue working without remuneration for several years (up to six in some cases) as a form of debt repayment to their former ‘owners’ for their loss.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the British state generously compensated British slave-owners for the financial loss of trade in what was the largest public pay-out in history, only exceeded in 2009 when the banks were saved from collapse. Astoundingly, British taxpayers continued to pay off the debt accrued by borrowing the millions needed in compensation given to former slave-owners up until 2015,<sup>39</sup> with some individuals being rewarded the equivalent of billions in today’s money.<sup>40</sup> Emerging research on the legacies of British slave-ownership traces how wealth accumulated through the trans-Atlantic slave trade has been invested through familial generations into various financial and credit institutions, which continue

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<sup>36</sup> Eckert, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> See Graeber, D. (2012). *Debt: The first 5000 years.* (UK: Penguin).

<sup>38</sup> Gopal, P. (2019). *Insurgent empire: anticolonial resistance and British dissent.* (Verso Books); Hall et al., *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Cork, T. (2018). ‘Taxpayers in Bristol were still paying debt to city’s slave owners in 2015, Treasury admits’. Retrieved 06/04/2020 from <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/taxpayers-bristol-were-still-paying-1205049>.

<sup>40</sup> Manning, S. (2013) ‘Britain’s colonial shame: Slave-owners given huge payouts after abolition’. Retrieved 06/04/2020 from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/britains-colonial-shame-slave-owners-given-huge-payouts-after-abolition-8508358.html>.

to hold immense economic power and sway into the present day.<sup>41</sup> These and other colonial legacies indicate that the global structures erected during the trans-Atlantic slave trade persist.<sup>42</sup>

In stark contrast to the experiences of slave-owners, former enslaved persons and their communities have received no compensation to date; in fact, the populations exposed to the violence of the slave trade, such as those in the Grassfields and beyond, continue to be exploited and oppressed today. Accordingly, when our research participants invoke the language of slavery to describe their situation, they are not doing so lightly. Slavery is invoked to draw attention to the recurring fear, trauma, and displacement that the ongoing violence is inflicting. Like the slave raids and massacres of the past, the anglophone communities of today are exposed to internationally sponsored military raids and massacres. Like in the past, when populations sought refuge by hiding in the forest, relied on vigilante defences, and resorted to witchcraft for protection, these same methods we find employed in the present time as modes of survival. And just like the past, when the wealth contained in people was unjustly stolen, unfair extraction of minerals and raw resources continues today. After centuries of exploitation, anglophone communities in Cameroon are calling on the international community to finally support them and not to exploit them. Such support is long overdue.

## Five Recommendations

The investigation and findings presented over the next four chapters lead us to the following recommendations for action:

1. For commentators to afford greater attention to the crimes committed by the Cameroon government and for a spotlight to be shone on international partners who have contributed to the accumulation of state power that has made these crimes possible.
2. For commentators and state representatives to avoid adopting a language of moral equivalence, which lends legitimacy to the Biya administration by failing to condemn in absolute terms the atrocities of state security forces. While violent crimes have been committed by multiple parties, differences of power must be heeded.
3. For nation states and other international parties to act multilaterally and place concerted pressure on the Cameroon government to end the violence, whether through trade sanctions, aid cuts, or other means.
4. For the international community to facilitate true dialogue, convened by an independent arbitrator, and to monitor the implementation of settlements reached. Representatives from disadvantaged communities should be invited to participate.
5. For representatives of nation states and other international agencies to avoid proclaiming whether a given option (e.g., secession) is non-negotiable – local stakeholders must have control of the available negotiating positions.

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<sup>41</sup> Hall et al., *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See also Daley, P. O. (2008). *Gender & Genocide in Burundi: the search for spaces of peace in the Great Lakes region*. (Oxford: James Currey); and Murrey, A. & Jackson, N. A. (2020). 'A Decolonial Critique of the Racialized "Localwashing" of Extraction in Central Africa'. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 110:3, pp. 917-940.

## Chapter 1. Inequality: The Root of the Conflict

It is too much. When we lie down, we cannot sleep well because of shooting. We live in fear. When you are asleep in your bed, you don't even want to see daybreak, and when you do see it and you're still alive, it means that your God is there with you.<sup>43</sup>

My family and I only survived because when we heard the shooting, when we heard the gunshots, and bullets hitting the walls, I told everyone to disappear. People only took with them the clothes that they were wearing.<sup>44</sup>

My neighbourhood is like a graveyard. People escaped overnight, for those who had a place to go. But for those who do not, we are just running around the bushes.<sup>45</sup>

How can somebody without a house be living in the bush? What type of a man is he? Is he an animal? . . . It's getting to the rainy season. I don't know where I will be sleeping.<sup>46</sup>

They burnt my bed, my cupboard, and my musical set – everything. . . . Everything I bought for the children, they burnt. . . . The house that I built and put everything into, they burnt it all. Everything was burnt.<sup>47</sup>

We don't go to our farms again because, when you go to the farm, bullets are flying all over, and the stray bullets are killing people in the farms. Many farms are now overgrown.<sup>48</sup>

We are praying to God for something to eat. If only we could have something to eat, we would be calmer in the face of this crisis, given that one does not know when it is going to end.<sup>49</sup>

Now most of us are sick because we don't have clean water.<sup>50</sup>

We don't know where to go.<sup>51</sup>

Escaping war is a not a privilege available to all. Whereas some families affected by conflict might be able to travel to a safer city, a different region, or seek refuge in another country, other families lack resources to escape the battlegrounds and must live the violence. Daily life for those trapped in the heart of the Cameroon conflict is tough, as revealed by quotations that open this chapter. There are military gun raids, mass executions of children as well as adults, kidnappings, torture, shootings, rape, and the complete burning down of homes, villages, and the bodies of anyone unfortunate enough to be trapped inside. Related to these primary harms, some families have been forced into homelessness, living in wild forests, vulnerable to illnesses and with limited access to

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<sup>43</sup> Esther, 44 years of age, used to run a small village market stall.

<sup>44</sup> Kelvin, 64 years of age, carpenter and farmer.

<sup>45</sup> Frank, 24 years of age, welder.

<sup>46</sup> Dominic, 60 years of age, farmer.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony, 64 years of age, builder.

<sup>48</sup> Ozias, 62 years of age, carpenter and farmer.

<sup>49</sup> Kelvin.

<sup>50</sup> Ozias.

<sup>51</sup> Tatiana, 50 years of age, farmer.

clean water. Worsening the situation, reduction in farm life is leading to food shortages, with families growing ever more used to the experience of hunger. Even for those who manage to escape imminent danger, life is far from easy, and many individuals from the anglophone regions of Cameroon have experienced reduced living standards. These troubles compound the disadvantage that anglophone communities were battling against before the conflict began.

Inequality is central to the Cameroon conflict, and it explains the causes as well as the effects. Mirroring the unrest that has erupted across Europe, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East, tensions in Cameroon can be seen as part of a global class struggle over access to limited resources and opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Huge imbalances in the distribution of the world's resources are now well-documented, and there are prominent, stark warnings about the dangers posed by rising levels of inequality.<sup>53</sup> For example, the influential French economist, Thomas Piketty, charts how the current exploitative economic system inevitably leads to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, and Piketty cautions that economic and social instability will inevitably surface when there is not structural intervention to redistribute resources.<sup>54</sup> In a similar vein, Guy Standing warns that trouble beckons for society given a growing precariat class, which comprises the most socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals in a social order, who are increasingly exposed to ever greater forms of insecurity.<sup>55</sup> The conflict in Cameroon can be seen as part of this broader picture of growing inequality, precarity, and discontent.

On this view, while tensions between the francophone majority and anglophone minority are important in the Cameroon conflict, they are best understood at the level of structural inequality and through an appreciation of power imbalance. Access to resources and opportunities are limited in Cameroon, with wealth largely concentrated in the hands of a political elite, which has left large sections of the wider society behind.<sup>56</sup> A marked way this inequality plays out in Cameroon is along the francophone-anglophone divide, where anglophone status is an added source of disadvantage that prevents access to employment and resources. In drawing our attention to economic and structural frustrations, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué wrote of Mancho Bibixy's 'coffin revolution', which is tied to the power imbalance between the marginalised anglophone citizens and the hegemonic francophone state:

On November 21, 2016, Mancho Bibixy, the newscaster of a local radio station, stood in an open casket in a crowded roundabout in the Anglophone Cameroonian city of Bamenda. Using a blow horn, Bibixy denounced the slow rate of economic and structural development in the city, declaring

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<sup>52</sup> Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain*. (Zed Books Ltd.); Hochschild, A. R. (2018). *Strangers in their own land: Anger and mourning on the American right*. (The New Press); Dabashi, H. (2012). *The Arab Spring: The end of postcolonialism*. (Zed Books Ltd.).

<sup>53</sup> Cope, Z. (2012). *Divided world divided class: Global political economy and the stratification of labour under capitalism*. (Kersplebedeb). Stiglitz, J. E. (2002). *Globalization and its Discontents (Vol. 500)*. (New York: Norton.); Trubek, D. M. & Santos, A. (Eds.). (2006). *The new law and economic development: a critical appraisal*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>54</sup> Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

<sup>55</sup> Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic).

<sup>56</sup> See Murrey, A. (2016). 'Slow dissent and the emotional geographies of resistance'. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 37(2), pp. 224–248



he was ready to die while protesting against the social and economic marginalization of Anglophone persons in the hegemonic Francophone state.<sup>57</sup>

Consistent with this perspective, our research participants also described living with persistent discriminatory treatment on account of being anglophone. Indeed, this is largely what motivated protests by anglophone lawyers, teachers, and other civilians, which in turn prompted the conflict.

The first part of this chapter takes a closer look at the economic frustrations described to us by our interview participants and reflects on how the anglophone status is seemingly undermined by the francophone state, and to some extent the majority francophone population more widely. In the second part of the chapter we move on to examine how the conflict is, in turn, worsening the inequality and marginalisation by the day. For some anglophone communities, what little they had has been cruelly snatched by the violence; from loved ones, to workshops, to homes. In addition to robbing people of their security and savings, the threat of famine lurks dangerously on the horizon, and the lost years of schooling for anglophone children portends even greater levels of inequality to come. Accordingly, without meaningful structural intervention, it is hard to see how the deep inequalities which ignited the conflict can be addressed.

## 1.1. Anglophone Disadvantage

In this first section of the chapter, we explore not just the anglophone-francophone divide, as the frequently cited cause of the conflict. Rather, we show that the conditions of structural inequality more generally form a deeper and ongoing cause of the conflict; the anglophone-francophone tensions are, we contend, just one manifestation of a larger structure.

### *Misallocation of anglophone resources*

The (mis)allocation of resources was a notable point of contention for some of the people we spoke with. Several interviewees, such as Ozias below, drew our attention to the lack of tarmacked roads in the anglophone regions, as compared to the francophone regions, which he thought prevents economic development.

We don't have good routes, but they are always telling lies about the ring road, which the president said he was going to personally supervise the construction of. Where is the ring road?<sup>58</sup>

Ozias also drew attention to frequent and prolonged periods when his entire region would not have access to electricity. In addition to preventing use of lights in the evening, electricity outages prevent access to clean running water and halt communication channels. Ozias wished for his community to have the freedom to explore alternative sustainable sources of energy, such as producing hydroelectricity from local waterfalls. However, he said, the current governance

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<sup>57</sup> Mougoué, J. T. (2017). 'The Coffin Revolution in Cameroon'. *Africa is a Country*. Retrieved on 30/03/2020 from <https://africasacountry.com/2017/05/the-coffin-revolution>.

<sup>58</sup> Affirming Ozias' observation, Adamu comments: 'Even when you look at the roads around [here], you will think that they are side streets, because a road will not even be four metres wide. So, we are accusing the government for all of these problems.'

structures prevent such social innovation; they instead focus on channelling resources outside of the anglophone regions than sustainable infrastructure within.

Indeed, available spending data from the Cameroon government backs up the fiscal disparity. Cameroon's Public Investment Budget from the financial year 2017 shows that the two anglophone regions (the North- and South-West) were significantly underfunded compared to the South alone, receiving a total of \$153 million compared to \$225 million respectively,<sup>59</sup> despite the fact that the two anglophone regions have a significantly larger population than the South.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the South, as has been noted, is home to the incumbent president, Paul Biya.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps such disparities could be explained by nepotism alone, rather than direct discrimination towards anglophone groups. However, we will see that there are further indications of anglophone marginalisation, such as barriers to access powerful government positions that would make it possible to favourably assign resources in the first place. At the very least, then, there is indirect discrimination against anglophone regions.

Beyond underfunding concerns, numerous research participants spoke of rich natural resources being extracted from anglophone regions, such as timber, rubber, food, gold, and oil. As Wendy explains, many anglophones feel they are not receiving the benefits of resource extraction:

We are fighting for our rights to ensure that we are treated well. From the beginning when we joined with the francophones, the hope was that we would live as one and share the national income equitably. But we have struggled for long and realised that anglophones are far behind. We have been suffering even in our own country. We cannot reap the benefits of our resources. The best of our produce like banana and rubber are all taken out of the anglophone zone. Anglophones cannot boast of benefiting in any way from the resources we have.

Likewise, when asked 'What are the main issues in the conflict?', Kelvin directly pointed to this issue:

Minerals. They can be extracting petrol from the [anglophone] South-West region, but it is piped directly to [the francophone city of] Douala for refinement. Do you think that that is how things should be? Why can it not be refined in the South-West region where it is extracted, so that the children who are born there could be allowed to enjoy their God-given fruits? In the [anglophone] North-West, there are eucalyptus trees that are used to produce electricity pools. The place where the wood is being processed is in [the francophone town of] Bafoussam. They cut down the trees in the North-West and they put them in the water in Bafoussam, and then they bring it back to the North-West. Why can't they do the whole process in the Northwest? Why can't they process it in the Northwest so that the children can work on it and get paid when they're involved in the process?

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<sup>59</sup> Freymeyer, C. (2018). 'The United States Can Stop Cameroon's Brutal Crackdown'. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/20/the-united-states-can-stop-camerouns-bloody-crackdown-biya-anglophone-africa/>.

<sup>60</sup> Cameroon Data Portal. (2017). *Cameroon Census Data*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://cameroon.opendataforafrica.org/rfdefze/census-data>.

<sup>61</sup> Freymeyer, *ibid.*

Multiple grievances of this nature led Kelvin to conclude that members of the ruling regime 'have come to our region and they have seen food and minerals. And they want to put us in the grave so that when they talk to us, we won't talk back.' Like Kevin, several other interviewees emphasised tensions over petroleum resources, an issue to which we return in Chapter 3 when we examine the responsibility of the international community in the conflict, and the UK in particular.

As before, the available evidence from other sources supports the concerns of our interviewees. Fambon et al., e.g., note that much of the economic development, job opportunity, and affluence is concentrated around Cameroon's two major urban centres, Douala and Yaoundé.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, several reports have found that the grand north of Cameroon, which comprises the Adamawa, North, and Far North regions, remains largely under-developed: there are huge disparities in poverty compared to the rest of the country, and they report lower rates of infrastructure security and job opportunities.<sup>63</sup> Notably, these impoverished regions of the country are all experiencing violence and conflict.

Adamu's view of inequality in the distribution of resources and work opportunities sees greed at the heart of it: 'We are in the hands of people who want to eat alone. They don't want that when they are breathing, you should breathe.' Likewise, Godfrey sees this inequality as violating basic norms of decency:

If you own a farm, and you have neighbours around it, you can't leave your own farm to go over to somebody else's farm and claim 'it is mine'. . . . [I]t's better for me to work my own farm, and whatever I harvest from it belongs to me. Why not go back [to work on your own part of the farm]? You are refusing because you know that most of the food, you are the one eating it and maltreating me in my own farm.

### ***Unequal educational and employment opportunities***

Related to the unequal allocation of resources, many interviewees pointed to the disparity in educational opportunities for anglophone students, particularly when seeking to access higher education. There were multiple references to the requirement to complete degrees and technical examinations in the French language, which disadvantaged anglophone students who struggled to speak fluent French alongside the multiple other languages they spoke, including English, Pidgin, and one or more local dialects. These difficulties were at the forefront of Nina's account:

[I]n universities, they want to teach students in French. That becomes very difficult. When I was at university, all of my courses were in French, so after class I had to hire a translator, then when I got to class it was in French again. Even doing admissions, it's in French.

Struggles that come from differential linguistic abilities are significant. There is a rich body of scholarship that demonstrates how language usage is an important source of power and mode of

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<sup>62</sup> Fambon, S., McKay, A., Timnou, J.-P., Kouakep, O. S., Dzossa, A. D., & Ngofo, R. T. (2016). 'Slow Progress in Growth and Poverty Reduction in Cameroon'. In C. Arndt, A. McKay, & F. Tarp (eds.). *Growth and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 293-316. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>63</sup> Ndeffo, L. N., Ngwen, N., Tegoum, P. J. N., Kamdem, C. B., & Tene, M. M. (2014). 'Impact of Equivalence Scales on the Spatial Distribution of Poverty in Cameroon: A Dynamic Approach'. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 48(1), 253-273.

domination.<sup>64</sup> When a particular language, and a way of speaking, becomes recognised as the official and correct form of speech, those who develop fluency in this dominant form are empowered in wide-reaching and extensive ways. Conversely, those who lack opportunities to develop proficiency in the dominant language can experience various barriers and hurdles, particularly in official situations. Since the advantages contained in the language we acquire, which is often only by chance of birth, are rarely made explicit, the linguistic limitations we experience are often misrecognised as personal failings while overlooking the true structural causes of linguistic inequality.<sup>65</sup>

The effects of linguistic inequality can be striking. People who lack a mastery of the dominant language can be excluded from accessing the opportunities and privileges that are available within that system. Indeed, our interview participants commonly spoke of exclusion from formal employment:

You see a lot of people with bachelor's and master's degrees out there without jobs. Some have had to resort to doing menial jobs like pushing trucks and selling second-hand clothes. So this conflict was just a culmination of the way the country had been for a long time.<sup>66</sup>

Now, you send the child to school, she goes and you give the bribe, and then your child comes back home and starts fighting with you over your slippers and bra. After you've spent all the money on the child, thinking that in future the child will take care of you, the child comes back and is working on the farm with you.<sup>67</sup>

This experience of precarity may be common for individuals from francophone backgrounds as well as anglophone backgrounds, especially in an international climate where global wealth accumulation has led to widespread economic strain, which is particularly pronounced in Cameroon.<sup>68</sup> Yet several of our research participants felt that they were at an added disadvantage to access these scarce employment opportunities in Cameroon *because* they were anglophone. Nina, for example, proclaimed that 'the French-speakers are the first to be employed. If you have a French-sounding name, you are more likely to be employed.' Agreeing with this sentiment, Kelvin asserted that 'no matter how an English-speaking child is educated, there is no place for that child in this country.'

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<sup>64</sup> Willis, R. (2018), "Let's talk about it": Why social class matters to restorative justice.' *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, Vol. 20, 2, 187-206; Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Gramsci, A. (2011). *Prison Notebooks (Vol. 2)*. (New York: Columbia University Press); Bernstein, B. (2003). *Class, codes and control: Applied studies towards a sociology of language (Vol. 2)*. (Psychology Press). Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. (CA: University of California Press).

<sup>65</sup> This is well explained by theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu.

<sup>66</sup> Wendy, 46 years of age, village trader.

<sup>67</sup> Esther, 44 years of age, used to run a small village market stall.

<sup>68</sup> Baye, F. M., & Fambon, S. (2002), 'Decomposition of inequality in the distribution of living standards in Cameroon'. *African journal of economic policy*, 9(2), 51-76; Baye, F. M. (2007) 'Exact Configuration of Poverty, inequality and Polarization Trends in the Distribution of well-being in Cameroon', Final report submitted to African Economic Research Consortium; Fambon, S., McKay, A., Timnou, J. P., Kouakep, O. S., Dzossa, A., & Tchakoute, R. (2014). 'Growth, poverty, and inequality: The case study of Cameroon'. (No. 2014/154), WIDER Working Paper.

The classed nature of inequality experienced by skilled anglophone workers is aptly captured by Patience, who managed to train as a healthcare worker. Despite great need for healthcare workers in Cameroon, Patience describes her struggle to access formal employment, which prevented her from putting the valuable skills she had acquired into practice:

[F]rom my own understanding, the main cause of this conflict is the unnoticeable behaviour of our French brothers and sisters, who don't notice that there are another people who are supposed to be like brothers and sisters but take us for second-class citizens. We go to school, the same schools as them, we come out, yet positions are only given to them. And if they are supposed to give a position to us, the anglophones, they give it as if it were a gift; you don't merit it. . . . We have very educated people, but in an office, you go there, you see somebody there is not competent, but the person is sitting in that office.

Here, Patience suggests that anglophones are treated as 'second-class citizens', and hence have a subordinated status. Despite being qualified for jobs, she recounts how anglophones are either excluded from these opportunities or treated as undeserving of them even when afforded them. Patience offered further insights as the interview progressed:

[A]s children, when we are growing, you hardly notice certain things, but it's when you are of a certain age, you start discovering these things when you see your peer that you were in school with – and then you were far better than – he is in a position that, you know that you merit that position more than that person [does], but you will see the person in that position. You begin to think otherwise. . . . It's really aching. Because you know this person's academic career. You know your career. You know other people in your class's careers. You know who merits this position but at the end, you see somebody sitting in the position that was not even qualified for that position. So, it's really aching.

Countering the perception that anglophones are any less deserving of jobs, Patience points to her experience of jobs being given unjustly to less capable employees. The sense of injustice is acute in Patience's account – this is far from meritocratic – and it injuriously leads Patience to begin to doubt herself. While this experience may well be shared with francophone colleagues, Patience's understanding of the discrimination is related to her anglophone background and a correspondingly lower social status. In this context, where anglophone workers have felt unduly marginalised and overlooked for employment opportunities, we can begin to appreciate the tensions created by the perceived encroachment of francophone employees into teaching and legal jobs ringfenced for anglophones due to the British colonial history. This, after all, was the fissure through which the violent conflict ultimately erupted.<sup>69</sup>

### ***'Slaves', 'cockroaches', and 'rats': the anglophone underclass***

Studies of marginalised groups in the US, UK, and beyond often discuss the social idea of there being a sub-class of human beings, who are deemed to be deficient and undeserving of

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<sup>69</sup> B.B.C. News. (2017). 'Cameroon: Teachers and lawyers in Bamenda strike over language row'. Retrieved 04/04/2020 from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-38559506>.

opportunities, and accordingly form the bottom layer of society.<sup>70</sup> The notion of the underclass refers to the most socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals and communities in a society, and has historically been used in derogatory fashion to blame disadvantaged groups and individuals for the existence of poverty, usually over and above the recognition of structural factors.<sup>71</sup> While distinguishing between different types of people is likely as old as time, these kinds of distinction form a core feature of the economic hierarchy in liberal societies, which colonial conquest spread further.<sup>72</sup> In ethnographic research, Willis critiques the underclass concept and shows how this powerful idea of the sub-human class – a so-called residuum – has persistently been employed to unjustly exclude, discriminate, stigmatise, and objectify underprivileged communities.<sup>73</sup>

We think this concept of the underclass provides an apt way to appreciate how some individuals from anglophone backgrounds feel they are viewed and treated by dominant groups in Cameroon.<sup>74</sup> Consider how Delphine reflects on her experience:

I think before the crisis and even up to now, the anglophones had never been looked at as anything serious. Even if you give your opinion somewhere, it was actually difficult to count unless you have to be part and parcel of the francophone regions. For [an anglophone] to be heard, you must have been brought over by the francophones before you are able to speak and be listened to; or you are a strong member of the CPDM – that is, the ruling party in the country. Even there at that milieu, there is still an aspect of segregation; you still realise that the opinion of an anglophone counts less. I think that is what I can say especially on the aspect of nonchalance. I don't want to use the word 'apartheid' because it will be too big for the situation, but it can be similar.

To convey how this differential treatment feels, Delphine describes it as a form of 'segregation' which can be compared to, though not equated with, South Africa's apartheid. The complex intersection of race, nationality, and class which this statement invokes is core to understanding the mistreatment of less powerful groups, such as anglophone Cameroonians, in a hierarchical

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<sup>70</sup> Welshman, J. (2007). *Underclass: a history of the excluded, 1880-2000*. (A&C Black); Jones, G. S. (2014). *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society*. (Verso); Shilliam, R. (2018). *Race and the undeserving poor: From abolition to Brexit*. (Agenda Publishing).

<sup>71</sup> Welshman, *ibid*.

<sup>72</sup> Bourdieu, P. (2012). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. (London: Routledge); Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E. B., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., & Wright, D. (2009). *Culture, class, distinction*. (London: Routledge). Skeggs, B. (2004). *Class, self, culture*. (London: Routledge).

<sup>73</sup> Willis, R. (forthcoming). *A Precarious Life: Understanding Class, Race and Conflict in a Deindustrialised Town*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

<sup>74</sup> Other scholarship makes use of class as a frame of analysis for the Cameroonian context. See Page, B. & Sunjo, E. (2017). 'Africa's middle class: building houses and constructing identities in the small town of Buea, Cameroon'. *Urban Geography*, 39(1), pp. 75–103; Page, B. (2019). 'Domestic Dramas: class, taste and home decoration in Buea, Cameroon'. In J. Noret (ed.). *Social Im/mobilities in Africa: Ethnographic Approaches*. (Oxford: Berghahn Books), 178–198.

social order.<sup>75</sup> Delphine recounts how this discrimination pervades different social arenas, such as the school:

I think the francophones feel superior to the anglophones and this has been for long. The fight has been for long. Even while we were in school, you will hear them call you certain names of marginalisation like *Biafran*; they laugh at you. The marginalised felt sad about it and it resulted in fighting, where they began from protesting till today that we are still fighting.

Delphine's recollection of anglophone Cameroonians being derisively referred to as 'Biafran' is noteworthy. Writing for the Guardian newspaper earlier this year, Frederick Forsyth offered a poignant account of Britain's role in the Biafran war, 50 years on.<sup>76</sup> In 1967, the people of Biafra in southeast Nigeria, neighbouring the Southern Cameroons, rose up and declared themselves the independent Republic of Biafra. The Nigerian Federal Military government responded with violence. According to Forsyth, the British government, under UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson, played a significant role in the conflict, covertly supplying weapons, ammunition, and advice to the dictatorial government of Nigeria. As a result of this brutal civil war, almost two million people starved to death, one million of whom were children.<sup>77</sup> In the context of this history, to be called 'Biafran' in a ridiculing tone incorporates several layers of otherness: to be a different ethnic group, to be apt subjects for state violence, to be outsiders in their own land, to be unsupported by the international community.

Our participants reported various other insults directed towards anglophone Cameroonians, which indicates that anglophones have been objectified, dehumanised, and treated as morally inferior in certain interactions with members from the dominant francophone milieu. For example, as Patience commented above, some interviewees described feeling like 'second-class' or even 'third-class' citizens. Others referred to being seen as akin to creatures such as 'rats', 'dogs', and 'cockroaches':

Before 2016, things were not actually moving. But we were struggling for things to move. Because the francophones already considered the anglophones as rats. . . . And the president did not want us to live like people. He wanted us to live like animals.<sup>78</sup>

They treat us like their slaves because we are really second-class citizens. Even the people, the government openly says, 'You people are dogs, rats, cockroaches.' When they say so, even those who don't understand, that never even saw the four walls of school, will at least be annoyed.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Crenshaw, K. (1990). 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color'. *Stan. L. Rev.*, 43, 1241; Hooks, B. (2000). *Where we stand: Class matters*. (New York: Routledge); Shilliam, *ibid.*; Virdee, S. (2014). *Racism, class and the racialized outsider*. (Macmillan Education UK).

<sup>76</sup> Forsyth, F. (2020). 'Buried for 50 years: Britain's shameful role in the Biafran war'. Retrieved 06/04/2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/buried-50-years-britain-shamesful-role-biafran-war-frederick-forsyth>.

<sup>77</sup> Jacobs, D. (1987). 'Lest We Forget the Starvation of Biafra'. *The New York Times*. 1 August 1987. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved 26/03/2020 from <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/01/opinion/1-lest-we-forget-the-starvation-of-biafra-462487.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Gisell, 37 years of age, farmer.

<sup>79</sup> Patience, 33 years of age, nurse.



Our interviewees repeatedly referred to being treated like slaves, especially by state military actors in the context of the conflict. Many instances illustrate that concern, which the following examples appropriately capture:

We are just slaves to *La République*. They have frustrated us with a lot of things.<sup>80</sup>

If you go around the North-West and South-West, you will see that that is what is being done to us. Right now, as I'm speaking, just as I left the village to come to town, I suffered. There were army roadblocks in place, and they pointed guns at us. All of my documents have already been burned when they burned my house. But when I want to go somewhere, they don't allow me to travel, because they keep on asking me which part of Cameroon I come from. We are just living like slaves. But even to slaves you give food; we are not being given anything.<sup>81</sup>

The widespread reference to slavery should move us to reflect on the parallels between the historic structures of slavery and the modern-day structures of trade, both of which were founded on hierarchical and exploitative economic relationships.<sup>82</sup> European and American lands saw the vast majority of the wealth benefits of the trade in African persons, while communities in sub-Saharan Africa disproportionately absorbed the harms. The legacies of these uneven relationships continue to shape current structures of resource distribution. In earlier centuries, labour facilitated the construction of new lands (as in the Americas) and principally generated wealth, hence labour itself was a highly valued resource. However, in the more recent global climate, other resources, such as oil, have overtaken it in value. What remains disturbingly constant, though, is the structure of exploitation: the trans-Atlantic slave trade saw individuals from African backgrounds captured by elite African colonial forces and sold *en masse* to powerful European traders; today, resources of value in the anglophone regions of Cameroon (minerals rather than people) are being extracted from local communities by the elite government of *La République*, and sold *en masse* to powerful European traders.

Another uncomfortable resonance of past European domination is evident in the insults used against individuals from anglophone backgrounds by state actors in Cameroon, which challenge the intellectual capabilities of anglophone persons. In the subsequent quotations, notice how subordination is tied to ideas of infancy, low intellect, slavery, and mistreatment:

[I]f about 100 children wrote the examination, only one would pass from the North-West. This was not because the children were not intelligent: the children were really intelligent. It was because we were being looked upon as slaves. And they didn't want anyone from the North-West to be successful.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ozias, 62 years of age, carpenter and farmer. *La République* refers to the French name for Cameroon, 'La République du Cameroun'; our interviewees frequently used the shortened version, which we replicate in this report.

<sup>81</sup> Kelvin, 64 years of age, carpenter and farmer.

<sup>82</sup> Green, T. (2019). *A fistful of shells: West Africa from the rise of the slave trade to the age of revolution*. (UK: Penguin); Hall, C., Draper, N., McClelland, K., Donington, K., & Lang, R. (2014). *Legacies of British slave-ownership: Colonial slavery and the formation of Victorian Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Walvin, J. (1992). *Slaves and slavery: The British colonial experience*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

<sup>83</sup> Pa Patrick, 88 years of age, village farmer.

So, up until now, we have been having problems, we are being tortured. They torture us on the streets, forcing us to accept what they want, and they call us ‘Anglofools’, meaning ‘Foolish English people’. They say that we don’t know anything.<sup>84</sup>

Delphine also claimed that anglophones could sometimes be referred to as ‘les enfants des Fru Ndi’, which translates to Fru Ndi’s children. Fru Ndi was a main oppositional anglophone leader from the North-West region of Cameroon, widely believed to have won the presidential election in 1992, yet who was immediately put under house arrest by the ruling party and the entire North-West was placed under a state of emergency.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Argenti notes that the terms ‘fools’ and ‘children’ are both used to depict the status of slaves in Cameroon, which reveals a darker side to such insults operating in the present.<sup>86</sup>

By not being recognised as full and equal moral persons, by allegedly being cast as insects, animals, and slaves who lack the capacity for intelligent thought, the anglophones are forced into the status of the sub-human. The origins of this flawed way of thinking can be traced back to theories of race science, which was heavily invested in and pursued by European researchers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>87</sup> The motivation behind these race theories was to justify the subordination and exploitation of African peoples. Race science was first used to justify slavery with the distasteful claim that people on the African continent were akin to animals and hence could be deprived of their basic humanity and respect; like animals, enslaved human beings from Africa were claimed to be less human, less evolved, and less feeling of pain. Then, following the abolition of slavery, race science continued to be developed as a justification for colonialism, used to claim that certain groups had not yet reached the full state of human development and hence needed to be taken care of by colonial masters.<sup>88</sup>

Notwithstanding hundreds of years of investment to prove race science, no evidence for these repugnant beliefs has ever been found.<sup>89</sup> In fact, what race science has indirectly taught us is that research motivated by prejudicial beliefs is prone to flawed methodology and false results.<sup>90</sup> Despite our knowledge in this area – that race is a social construct with no biological underpinning – ideas of race science stubbornly persist and still largely infuse cultural beliefs in Europe, America, and beyond. It is plausible that our interviewees’ references to feeling treated as though slaves and as less intelligent than other groups are rooted partially in these European myths, which last not because of any intellectual credibility, but simply because of European and Anglo-American hegemony.

The continuity of the historical subjugation of the Cameroon anglophone population in the present day led some of our research participants to assert their right for freedom. Indeed, the

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<sup>84</sup> Kelvin.

<sup>85</sup> Argenti, N. (2008). *The intestines of the State: Youth, violence, and belated histories in the Cameroon Grassfields*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>87</sup> Shilliam, ibid.; Saini, A. (2019). *Superior: The Return of Race Science*. (London: 4<sup>th</sup> Estate).

<sup>88</sup> Shilliam, ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man*. (New York: WW Norton & Company); Saini, ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

current conflict was seen by some interviewees as the much-awaited moment of resistance in the history of the oppressed Southern Cameroons. As stated by Pa Patrick, ‘when the conflict started, we were happy, because the people from East Cameroon, they were looking at us like foolish people. They were looking at us like people that they had conquered.’ After a few hundred years of subordination – through the institution of slavery; further conquest by the colonial forces of Germany, the UK, and France; and then decades of additional domination by the majority francophone state – many interviewees express the desire to be free.

## **1.2. Worsening Levels of Inequality**

As well as causing the conflict, inequality is also being worsened by the conflict. The most severe, immediate, and irreversible criminal offences that we were informed about were loss of life, violence against the person, and sexual offences, which we examine in more detail in the next chapter. In this section, we examine harms such as property damage and loss of schooling, which are having a ripple effect on the injuries experienced by victims and will likely have a longer-term effect on the levels of structural inequality so far explored. Growing inequality is adding fuel to a fire which is becoming increasingly difficult to contain.

### ***Homelessness and loss of livelihood***

The voices that opened this chapter reveal a chain of injuries. When an anglophone community is attacked, either due to a battle between the Amba fighters and the state military or being set alight by the state for allegedly harbouring Amba fighters, residents must flee their homes to survive. As a result of such crimes, and particularly the arson of entire villages, many anglophone Cameroonians have been made homeless. For those who face this fate, some have found alternative shelter, often by staying with family and friends. However, the most disadvantaged victims have resorted to living in ‘the bush’, which refers to the extensive forest areas in the anglophone regions. This form of homelessness reportedly prevents people from accessing clean water and exposes families to contracting further illnesses, such as malaria, which is prevalent outdoors in Cameroon.

Our interview participants have given us a glimpse of the strenuous material cycle they go through to build a house, what it thus means to have a home, and what it means to lose it. Some have spent their entire lifetimes building a house; it is a life’s work. For a tin roof, materials are slowly acquired after selling on the market the products of their long labour; this basic, painstaking process is characteristic of every element: plastering the mud walls, concreting the floor, laying the tiling. Further, what goes into this ambition is sometimes the work of many – relatives in the diaspora working gruelling hours in one or more underpaid jobs in the global north, sending back a significant proportion of what they earn.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to the loss of homes, a large majority of our interview participants had lost their livelihood as a result of the conflict. Before the crisis began, Kelvin used to be a carpenter.

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<sup>91</sup> For more on this phenomenon, see Page & Sunjo, *ibid.*

Now I am in the house, only trying to tender chickens because I am old. I also took care of my pigs, but the soldiers came and shot all of the pigs and killed them. . . . At my age, I'm not able to work, so I can't make any money to pay for the rebuilding of my home. They burned cars as well. I bought two motorbikes and we used them for public transportation. These bikes, I gave them to some boys to drive around for work, and from that I earned about 2,000 francs per day.<sup>92</sup> But then they came and burned the bikes too. And they burned my compound. Two big houses, and they reduced them to rubble.

Kelvin explained to us how he lost all of his life investments and the security he thought he had carved out for his future, which his old age makes it unlikely he will recover from. Blasius also suffered irreparable damage to his home and fortune:

As we are speaking now, I don't know if I'll be able to get to the level where I had been. I don't know if this is the end of my life, I don't know. Because they burnt down my whole compound. The kitchen, the living room – the whole compound they burnt down. They have burnt almost 16 compounds in my neighbourhood. 16 in number, as of now. So more than 16 people are homeless; they don't have a place to stay.

Blasius's life itself is damaged, because, as he hits his sixth decade, his life was so much bound up with his trade and his home, which was his place of work. Pa Elias is over 70 years old, and also lost his house to arson; he says it 'took so many years to build up'. 'They razed my house down with explosives after looting it, carrying everything, the Cameroon army.' In all of the instances of arson so far mentioned, state military actors were accused of perpetrating the crimes. Understandably, the more that an individual's life project is contained in what gets destroyed, the more injurious are the wounds.

Even those who, unlike Kelvin, are of prime working age struggle to find any revenue when their occupation is tied to a dwelling or house that is burnt down. And, as Frank told us, that has a knock-on effect on the support which a person can provide to their dependents:

We are really down. My workshop, which was burnt down alongside my house, was a source of income to me and my family. Now, we are down. We are just there like people who have 'gone off' [who are mentally unwell]. We don't even have anything to eat. We are sleeping in the bushes. Today, we are in one part of the bush, and tomorrow we are in the next. So, this problem has really put us down.

Frank's account is a window into the sheer destitution that some unfortunate families have been thrown into. The word 'down', as well as 'backwards', surfaced in several of our interviews to explain the effects of the conflict. Frank's emphasis on how 'down' his family has become is at once an acknowledgement of what they have lost in a material sense – their home, income, access to food, and more – as well as an indication of the harm to their mental wellbeing. The trauma from this conflict is going to require a great amount of healing.

The impact of the injuries weighed especially heavily on two of our interviewees who were living with disabilities. Esther, who lives with a physical disability, is now homeless, living in the bush,

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<sup>92</sup> Just under £3, or just over \$3.

and has become reliant on begging. Ivo, who has had reduced mobility from birth, succeeded in building up a business to trade that suited him well, because with the right tools, he could have a lasting profession and provide for his family. The conflict changed that:

The struggle has pushed me backwards. . . . [T]hey came and burnt my workshop and carried away some of my possessions. . . . My parents struggled with me until I grew up and then I had to learn [my trade] and opened up a workshop. So, I have a wife and a child. So, at the moment, I don't know what to do to help them in order to raise up my family because my workshop has been burnt down. They took away my work tools and now I don't know what to do. So, I'm now in the village begging to eat.

Like Esther, Ivo has had his independence snatched from him and described having to resort to begging. For some persons living with disability, the conflict has been even crueller. Fredrick told us about his cousin, who was hard of hearing, which prevented him from running away when the military came:

They shot my direct cousin dead. He died on the spot. He had a problem with the ears. So maybe as they were running, maybe as people were running and doing all what sort of noise, since we know he had problems with the ears. We don't know what happened. The military just got to the house, removed him, brought him back to the corner, and shot him dead. . . . He was married with two kids. He was shot dead.

The difficulties do not end there for so many anglophones who have been harmed by this conflict. Wellbeing is a function of, among other things, a working economy and system of trade. But the inability of individuals to procure their own livelihoods of course drastically limits the economic power and ultimately the wellbeing of whole communities. Blasius's quality of life is greatly diminished because he is no longer an economic actor after suffering arson attacks by the state:

As you know in this village, we live just on corn, on beans, on ground nuts; but when all this is burnt down, you don't have anything to sell, and so you cannot afford to buy other things. As we're speaking, I'm sleeping on the floor because there is nothing for me to sell to afford to buy a mattress.

Ozias notes how, likewise, the coffee trade has dried up, since even though they have the beans, 'there are no buyers'. And without income, he says, the children cannot attend school. Nonetheless, the population continues to increase: 'You still have children coming forth because when people are not working, they still give birth to children.' That means more mouths to fill, with significantly reduced access to food or revenue. Moreover, basic goods like toilet roll become unaffordable, even at the cost of 100 francs (less than £0.15). Despite the anglophone regions being rich in natural resources, many resources remain inaccessible to civilian anglophones like Ozias:

You could get money to buy matches, but there is no store selling them. . . . It is not easy to get kerosene or a candle. So, when there's no electricity, people live as if they're in a burial ground, and they don't know when there'll be sunshine.

### ***A famine on the horizon***

The lack of food and basic resources our interviewees described to us is of great concern. There is undeniably malnourishment; Anthony's situation is dire:

I am not able to feed my family again. I was managing to build before, so I could feed my children, but now I am again unable to do this.

The aforementioned loss of trade and occupation presents bleak prospects for those who, like Anthony, now have no alternative source of income to provide for their families. Interviewees revealed a number of causes for a similar predicament: their produce had been stolen, either by the army or a separatist fighter group; their goods or their workplace was destroyed by arson attacks; the farmland had become dangerous to access, and was now no longer viable; and their previous system of trade and market specialisation had been totally upended.

Surviving in such conditions has meant that families affected by losses have become heavily reliant on the wider community for support. To a large extent, local values of relationality, solidarity, and kinship have provided a crucial and much-needed safety net. Take Delphine, for example, who informed us that she had 'harboured more than 23 persons' in her house for up to fourteen months, which required providing food, medical costs, and support to relocate. Consequently, Delphine informed us that she had exhausted all of her savings. However, there are indications that the length of the conflict, the increased numbers of casualties, and the weight of the burden is starting to strain the ability for wider communities to continue providing this vital role. Adding to this strain, Esther describes how even begging has become difficult:

Even if we are to go back home, we will not have money to buy the oil to cook, and we move around begging people to let us live in their houses, and soldiers are still chasing us away from the houses where we beg to stay. We are just begging you people to persuade them to leave and let us be, because the suffering is too much. They come and arrest people from their houses and they burn their mothers.

On Esther's account, instead of giving support, the state army operates in ways that worsen the situation for those who are finding themselves in need of food and shelter. A further event described by Esther hints at a reason why informal safety nets might be hindered by state actors:

On the day of the elections, they said they brought food to give to the villagers. And when we went there, they brought a ballot box. And they said, 'If you want to take a bag of rice, you have to vote before you can take it.' So, we refused to vote and we did not take the food. People like the Mayor, they took children to school to vote, but we in the villages, we did not vote. We refused the food and said: if the reason for bringing the food was for us to submit before taking the food, we are not ready. Because we had been eating our own food to survive, and that food was never provided by them.

While the promise of food may have enticed members of Esther's village to come out to vote, Esther describes rural people as insisting on their right to abstain; resistance towards a regime which many viewed as illegitimate was stronger than the pains of hunger. This indicates that the devotion and support for the anglophone political cause is strong, and it shows the determination that some people have to assert independence even in the face of great adversity.

We believe that if there is not an end to this targeted state harassment soon, or if there is not a sustained programme of humanitarian relief, anglophone Cameroon could experience a devastating famine. Many of our interviewees were hungry. They and their communities have

limited or no income, no exports, damaged farmland (which they may not be able to return to without incurring the risk of being shot), young children and babies on the way, and they can even be prevented from pleading for assistance. If we are right in our assessment that famine is on the horizon, it presents another key reason for a serious response to the conflict from nation state actors and other international agencies.

We have heard in this chapter so far from ordinary anglophone Cameroonians that the conflict has brought about a lack of trade, jobs, food, shelter, and home – in short, it is continuing to deteriorate the wellbeing of anglophone civilians. This crisis demonstrates plainly how the situation is most ominous for those who, pre-conflict, were already disproportionately disadvantaged. Many who are currently in the most perilous positions had lived in villages, were subsistence farmers, and had dependents. Without the ability to move great distances, receive funds from external sources, or take up new occupations, their persecution by armed forces is increasingly fatal.

### ***Stolen education: greater inequality to come***

The topic of education has been central to this conflict. After lawyers began their peaceful protests against the appointment of French-speaking judges to the anglophone civil law courts, teachers were soon to follow, protesting a similar encroachment into the education sector. And ever since the state responded to those protests with severe force, schools have been a literal battleground. First, the militant arms of the Ambazonian separatist movement issued lockdowns on geographical areas and placed restrictions on participating in aspects of civic life. But since then, and as revealed to us by our interviewees themselves, the state itself has also been locking down and attacking schools. We discuss both topics more fully in Chapter 2, including the *prima facie* rationale for these strategies. Here, we explore the concerns of our interviewees about the fact that education has come to a standstill for many in the anglophone regions. We find out that, yet again, the future does not bode well for those already most vulnerable.

Many of our interviewees held the lack of education to be a serious concern for them. They saw it as intrinsically related to their future. When Ozias looks ahead, he fears the worst, because school is about educating, but also guiding and monitoring children:

It was easier when they were going to school for them to be taught and controlled. . . . Some of the children now have just learned how to shoot birds, because they can't go to school. Some are just moving around hunting and digging for rats. They have no other preoccupation. [But] if they were studying, they would have been trying to see what the future holds for them and dreaming about the future. I'm just wondering what the future will look like for these children, and how the country in which we are living will be in future.

After a number of years, Blasius likewise laments the children will have no future: 'No child has been to school, and the children are growing every day. . . . [W]hat will their future be like? That's what is disturbing us.' Educating the young properly is, for him, a principal reason to end the conflict, because 'you don't know about tomorrow, and if it weren't for school, you yourself wouldn't be sitting there'. Pa Fabian feels the same:



Some of the children have grown old and they have not gone to school; they are staying at home. They're just moving around the village. . . . It hurts me to see these little kids, because I don't know what their future holds. No schools. That's what worries me a lot.

Wendy fears a kind of moral decline: 'If you allow these children at home without an education, they will all become thieves'. But others, like Nora, point to a more lasting worry – reasonably, that without education the children will be less capable:

Children are staying at home; they are not going to school and they are no longer intelligent. When you ask a child a question, he or she cannot answer. When you even ask a child to write, the child cannot write. Children have turned into fools.

A child is a loved one, but they are also a kind of investment for the future – for their own, their parents', their communities' collective futures. But the stakes for a real loss of future are not felt evenly. The ability of our interviewees to find a solution to the education problem varied, and it tracks how precariously positioned they are. Some of our interviewees, like Frederick, could afford private schooling, which has been less affected than the state school system by the crisis:

I managed to send them [to] a private school, so that they can be there and have their O-Levels and start seeing what to do. And that has put additional cost on our savings. [Pre-conflict], they were going to [a] school here which was around 250,000 [CFA] per annum. But now [it is more than double the cost].<sup>93</sup>

Others with less wealth than pre-conflict have come to accept that they must now spend less on their children's schooling, such as Lambert:

I could afford a good education for my kids but the school they attend now is one of the lowest schools. That is what I can afford, and I have to go with it. The schools with a higher standard where my kids used to go – I can no longer send them there. I pray that the crisis comes to an end so that my children can get a better education for themselves.

The predicament those like Lambert face, then, amounts to a loss of social position – in material terms and cultural too, for now having fewer connections to the privileged in society at school. Those with a stock of wealth to rely on may suffer a dent in their reserves, but can secure their children, and themselves in turn, a more stable future. Others still will have to rely on family, as Kelvin notes:

If you are not rich enough to allow your child to move out of this place, then you have to arrange with a family member for them to pay part of the costs. Most people here, who are rural people and are poor, where do they expect their own kids to go?

Those especially with family in the diaspora will be able, to some extent, to ameliorate the worst effects by securing some fees toward their children's education at the cost of wealth for the wider family. But Kelvin points out something even more concerning: without doubt, the education problem hits the poorest worst; it removes or erodes their futures in a tangible sense. For the

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<sup>93</sup> 250,000 CFA is around £333 or \$417 at the time of writing.

precariat, they will never have enough money for schooling under present conditions. Kelvin suggests that the parents of any child from an anglophone region who goes to school 'are rich', because it might require affording rent in a francophone area *and* paying school fees.

Supposing that the conflict will finally be resolved – be that through separation, federation, or some other intervention – the picture given to us by our interviewees is such that those with the least means will continue feeling the effects long after the conflict. Many of the underprivileged will have had their past, present, and future destroyed: the significance and material worth tied together with the farm and the home, the work and earning potential that comes from good schooling, and the family members who passed to tragedy.

### **1.3. Parting Thought**

It would be a mistake to conceptualise the Cameroon conflict as simply between one group that identifies as anglophone and another that identifies as francophone: the issues stretch much farther. The tensions are better understood as connected to ongoing structural inequalities, in which historically oppressed populations in the Southern Cameroons are further oppressed by groups with relative power. The francophone-anglophone divide is one way in which these deeper-rooted issues have surfaced, and do indeed matter, but the conflict should not be reduced to this frame.

Mindful of structural inequality being the root cause of the conflict, we believe that the longer the conflict goes on for, the wider the divisions will grow. As levels of inequality rise, the harder it will be, increasingly, to find peaceful resolution. Socioeconomic structural intervention is ultimately needed to resolve these underlying issues.

## Chapter 2. The Error of Moral Equivalence

Atrocities have been committed on both sides. . . . It is a dirty war, and no one comes out of it with any credit at all.<sup>94</sup>

On 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020, severe violence was inflicted on the people of Ngarbuh, a remote village hidden in the forests of the Grassfields. At least 21 civilians were killed, including 13 children and an unborn baby. Human Rights Watch (HRW) spoke with 25 people, 3 of whom were direct witnesses, and 7 of whom were relatives of the victims.<sup>95</sup> After compiling witness statements, HRW reported that the Ngarbuh massacre had been committed by a group of at least 10 soldiers, some who were from the Cameroon elite unit, the *Rapid Intervention Battalion* ('BIR'), and a group of 30 armed ethnic Fulani (a pastoralist people with whom the anglophones have had tensions for some time). According to witness accounts, the group began looting in the Ngarbuh 1 village in late evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>, before splintering into a smaller group, which looted and assaulted civilians in Ngarbuh 2 in the early hours of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Following this, at approximately 5 a.m., the group proceeded to massacre civilians in Ngarbuh 3. The armed group then burnt houses down, some with deceased still inside. Witnesses present described the soldiers shooting women and children one by one.

Despite numerous witness accounts that implicate the Cameroon state in the Ngarbuh massacre, Ilaria Allegrozzi of HRW has been one of the few international actors prepared to condemn the atrocities of the Cameroon state in absolute terms. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, offered condolences to the families and urged 'the government of Cameroon to conduct an investigation and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable.'<sup>96</sup> He then called for 'armed actors to refrain from attacks against civilians'. A very similar statement was offered by the UK's Minister for Africa, James Duddridge,<sup>97</sup> who has subsequently been asked twice by MP Emily Thornberry in writing about the incident; in reply both times, however (and as recently as the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020), Duddridge failed to condemn the Cameroon government specifically for the attack.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, rather than condemning the Ngarbuh massacre for what it was – a series of state-sponsored crimes against some of the most defenceless civilians – international actors toed to a non-committal line, and the Cameroon government was free to continue operating in the same

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<sup>94</sup> HOL Hansard. (2018). Vol. 793, Col. 1954.

<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2020). 'Cameroon: Civilians Massacred in Separatist Area'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/25/cameroon-civilians-massacred-separatist-area>.

<sup>96</sup> Dujarric, S. (2020). 'Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on the reported killing of civilians in Cameroon'. Retrieved 06/03/2020 from <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-02-17/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-the-reported-killing-of-civilians-cameroon-scroll-down-for-french-version>.

<sup>97</sup> FCO & Duddridge, J. (2020a). 'Cameroon: Minister for Africa calls for restraint and dialogue following violence'. Accessed 05/03/2020 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cameroon-minister-for-africa-calls-for-restraint-and-dialogue-following-violence>.

<sup>98</sup> See FCO & Duddridge, J. (2020b). 'Cameroon: Homicide: Written question – 21920'. *Parliament.uk*. Accessed 25/03/2020 from <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-27/21920>; and FCO & Duddridge, J. (2020c). 'Cameroon: Homicide: Written question – 29868'. Accessed 25/03/2020 from <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-16/29868>.

way without great scrutiny. Within two weeks of the Ngarbuh massacre, another state-sponsored massacre reportedly occurred in the village of Small Babanki.

In discourse on the Cameroon conflict, it is not uncommon for international observers to use the phrase, as with other conflicts, ‘abuses on both sides’.<sup>99</sup> In this case, one side is understood to be state security forces, and the other side armed oppositional ‘Amba’ fighters. Indeed, the words in the quotation by Lord Boateng to open this chapter were used to open a UK House of Lords debate in 2018 on the conflict. Towards the end of his contribution to the debate, Lord Boateng again deplored ‘the long-standing grievances and current abuses of human rights on all sides’.<sup>100</sup> Notwithstanding the appalling nature of atrocities committed by any party in the conflict, it is worth penetrating into whether this language masks several morally important differences between the parties. For such differences, if present, could indicate that there ought to be distinct and particular responses to the disparate crimes committed.

Rightly, Lord Boateng also noted that innocent civilians stand in harm’s way, though again, the image evoked is one according to which state military actors and armed separatist militants pose the same kind or depth of threat:

Innocent people are being caught between a rock and a hard place: between on one hand the separatists, who terrorise them, and on the other the government, who also terrorise them and at the same time fail to protect them.<sup>101</sup>

Lord Boateng’s opening remarks did also provide a useful and important background to the conflict. He closed them with a quotation from an affected party, thereby allowing ‘the people of English-speaking Cameroon to speak for themselves’.<sup>102</sup> This is, indeed, a crucial principle, and for this present paper it is foundational. But it is on the basis of following that principle that we notice many descriptions of violence by the international community diverge from the collective experiences of those we interviewed on the ground.

The themes of analysis in this present report derive from interview data, which was collected via direct spoken correspondence with a number of anglophone Cameroonians currently living in and affected by the conflict. After consulting and analysing this information, we find that the framing of the conflict as ‘atrocities on both sides’ is unhelpful at best. Our interviewees reported numerous disparities between state and separatist violence that ought to be recognised by international commentators and actors. This population reports violence by different parties as varying at least in respect of force, extent, motivation, and lasting consequence. Moreover, the attitudes expressed towards the separatist fighters are not, broadly, those of a group terrorised by them. Accordingly, on the basis of our research, we maintain that such language, when it amounts to moral

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<sup>99</sup> Our former report took a similar approach; see Willis, R., McAulay, J., Ndeunyema, N., Angove, J. (2019). ‘Human Rights Abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: A Submission of Evidence to UK Parliament’. Retrieved 05/04/2020 from <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/human-rights-abuses-in-the-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-recommendations-for-action/>.

<sup>100</sup> HOL Hansard, *ibid.*, Col. 1955.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1954.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1955.

equivalence, plausibly fails to represent the reality of violence in the conflict – as reported through the eyes of those most affected.

The harm of drawing moral equivalence stretches beyond the inaccurate representation of the experiences of those living through the conflict: by failing to recognise the distinctive and disproportional harms committed by the Cameroon state, the international community empowers the Cameroon state to commit further crimes with impunity. Instead of addressing a state atrocity in full, and on its own terms, moral equivariance permits the state to defend the wrong committed. In the course of this chapter, we will see how the Cameroon state uses all five of the neutralisation techniques identified by Gresham Sykes and David Matza when responding to reports of state violence: ‘denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victims, appeal to higher loyalties, and condemnation of condemners’.<sup>103</sup> Despite these techniques being well-known strategies which offenders employ to avoid moral judgement, by invoking the language of moral equivalence, other powerful actors outside of the state in effect support the neutralisation of the wrong. Without full condemnation of the crimes, the Cameroon state can continue the pattern of offending unchecked.

Since the effects of not holding the Cameroon state to account are so damaging, we might ask why international actors continue to draw moral equivalence. There are likely multiple intersecting reasons. Perhaps diplomacy and soft approaches are required to maintain good working relationships with the Cameroon state, which could be required to have longer-term influence, provide humanitarian aid, perform a peacebuilding role, and so on. This is especially likely to be the case for those on the ground for diplomatic, humanitarian, and sometimes journalistic reasons; in those cases, the need not to take sides may well be critical for the safety of those actors.

However, for those at a step removed – larger media organisations, foreign governmental representatives, and significant international groups and businesses – this reason may be less pressing. A more cynical view might attribute the failure of some international actors to call out the full wrongs of Cameroon state as economically motivated, in order to maintain access to Cameroon’s bounteous natural resources. Relatedly, perhaps there is also reluctance to bring the full extent of the crimes of the Cameroon state squarely into view because to do so could expose pre-existing trade deals and international involvement in the training of the Cameroon army, and hence reveal the partial responsibility of international actors for the recurrent and ongoing crimes being committed. We consider the role of international actors more closely in the next chapter.

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the crimes of the Cameroon state and our research participants’ experiences of them. We begin by briefly looking more closely at the tendency of the UK actors in particular to draw moral equivalence. To show the substance of this error, we move on to reveal the disparity of strength possessed by the Cameroon state compared to other actors, and the unmatched state mechanisms *La République* can draw on in the conflict. The chapter ends with a reflection on local perceptions of the Amba forces, which sit in stark contrast to the general fear citizens have of the state. As a result of this discussion, we are of the view that international

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<sup>103</sup> Sykes, G. & David, M. (1957). ‘Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency’. *American Sociological Review*, 22: 664–670.

actors need to move beyond ‘the crimes have been committed on both sides’ narrative, and truly hold to account the Cameroon state for the atrocities it is committing on anglophone civilians.

## 2.1. The Error Explained

We are not the first to raise the worry about making a moral equivalence. In the same exchange in the House of Lords, Lord Alton cautioned the British government:

The government must not suggest that this is a ‘level playing field’ conflict in a civil war between two equal sides. Too often in the past, in Bosnia, in Rwanda and in Darfur, the UK chose the path of moral equivalence. Hinting that both sides are as bad as each other is the easy way out. In a previous generation, this was known as appeasement. Moral equivalence signals that we cannot be expected to pass judgment on which side is more to blame for the conflict.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately, discourse in key media organisations, and in recent government publications, still commits the same equivalence. For example, an April 2019 House of Commons Briefing Paper writes that ‘since October 2017 violent conflict has erupted between armed separatist groups and the security forces, with both sides being accused of committing human rights abuses’. And again further down the same page: ‘Both sides stand accused of committing serious human rights abuses’.<sup>105</sup> Those claims, as stated, remain undoubtedly true, but it would be rather misleading to take the purported balance at face value.

Baroness Goldie’s response on behalf of the government rightly acknowledged that, ‘as in many conflict situations, it is not always easy to establish accurately what is happening on the ground’.<sup>106</sup> Our access, however, to first-person reports of those most affected by the conflict gives us enough perspective to see that her following remark perpetuates the moral equivalence: ‘While it is clear that the anglophone community has legitimate concerns, terrible human rights violations and abuses have been carried out by both sides’.<sup>107</sup> Notably, Baroness Goldie did also give a fuller response to the concern raised by Lord Alton:

We do not claim this to be a level playing field. . . . As the noble Lord notes, Amnesty International has reported that 185 members of the security services have been killed by anglophone separatists, so we do not claim moral equivalence but neither can we neglect the role that armed separatists are playing in worsening the situation.<sup>108</sup>

As a response to the concern that the UK government may be committing a moral equivalence, we deem this inadequate. While we do not here fail to condemn Amba militia violence, the voices in this report nonetheless contextualise it as having a particular end, scope, and background. By contrast, state-committed violence has continued to escalate at a pace, extremity, and

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<sup>104</sup> HOL Hansard, *ibid.*, Col. 1962.

<sup>105</sup> Lunn, J. & Brooke-Holland, L. (2019). ‘The Anglophone Cameroon crisis: April 2019 update’. *House of Commons Library*, p. 3. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8331/CBP-8331.pdf>.

<sup>106</sup> HOL Hansard, *ibid.*, Col. 1965.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1965-66.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, Col. 1966.

indiscriminateness which significantly outstrips that of separatist groups. Accordingly, in denying that it is making a moral equivalence, the British government does not bolster its case by citing the then reported figure of military deaths caused by separatists; this barely scratches what is condemnable about the conflict.

By contrast, a party which has, in our view, found the right balance in their condemnation of Biya's government is a group of nine US Congress members, headed by Karen Bass. The group wrote to President Biya personally in December of 2019, and their kind of unequivocal statement is to be encouraged:

We understand that non-state armed groups are responsible for horrific acts of violence and we condemn those acts in the strongest terms. But a broad spectrum of international and domestic experts disagree with the Cameroonian government's assertion that non-state armed groups are responsible for most of the violence: on the contrary, there is consistent and convincing evidence from a variety of unbiased and independent sources that Cameroonian security forces are responsible for the majority of killings of unarmed Cameroonian citizens and destruction of property including the burning of homes. There is evidence of soldiers dragging wounded people out of hospitals and their lifeless bodies found abandoned later. Soldiers have raped women, either for opportunistic or punitive reasons.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, the British government in official remarks continues to downplay the significance of state-committed atrocities. In the most recent Commons Chamber FCO answers to questions on the topic (April 2019), the Minister for Africa Harriet Baldwin twice sought to emphasise the culpability of different parties to the conflict: 'the violence from both sides is creating a serious situation for civilians on the ground';<sup>110</sup> in response to a question which cited the fact that the Cameroon government has 'killed scores of civilians . . . and torched hundreds of homes', Baldwin only noted how, indeed, 'there have been human rights abuses and human rights violations on all sides in the conflict. Hospitals have been burnt and villages torched'.<sup>111</sup>

The window into the conflict which civilians have given us illuminates all too clearly that by equivocating thus, the British government abnegates its responsibility to specially condemn state-sanctioned violence and to support affected civilians in every way possible. As Lord Alton remarked in the Commons debate,

There is nothing admirable about being even-handed in the face of the suffering of the anglophone community.<sup>112</sup>

Through the reflections of English-speaking civilians on the ground in this conflict, in this chapter we describe the disparity between state and Amba violence, in various crucial respects. As a result

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<sup>109</sup> Bass, K., et al. (2019). 'Congressional Letter to His Excellency Paul Biya'. *Congress of the United States*. Accessed 19/03/2020 from <https://bass.house.gov/sites/bass.house.gov/files/Congressional%20Letter%20to%20His%20Excellency%20Paul%20Biya%20Final%2012%202019.pdf>.

<sup>110</sup> HOC Hansard. (2019). Vol. 657, Col. 911.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., Col. 913.

<sup>112</sup> HOL Hansard, *ibid.*, Col. 1963.



of this investigation, we deem Lord Alton's warning to be wise, and one which the British government and other international actors ought to heed moving forwards.

## **2.2. The Strength of the State**

Superficially, it may seem that both Amba fighters and state forces have similar methods of warfare: both are reported to close down schools, burn down compounds, kidnap targets, and commit murder. Yet the Cameroon state forces and Amba forces cannot be equated. For one, the Cameroon state is supported by an armed military and has access to substantial financial resources. In notable contrast, the Amba forces largely seem to consist of untrained farmers and precarious workers who have gradually become increasingly militarised. Those disparities in strength inevitably mean that most of the injuries and harms reported to us by our interview participants were committed by the Cameroon state. This reflects the fact that most of those who have died in this conflict have been anglophones, whom the state has been killing in the thousands, compared to the killings by the Amba forces which are more in the hundreds. We now take a closer look at these disparities in terms of force, effect, fearfulness, and spin.

### ***Disparities of force***

Our research participants were acutely aware of the physical power over them that the state forces possess and display, and drew our attention to the copious military resources at their disposal. Nina, for example, informs us of how heavily geared up the state forces are, and the corresponding fear villagers have to hide when the military arrives:

The military is armed to the teeth. We sit in the house and lock our doors and hope that they do not come to us. All day the military are beating on the doors. If they get in, then if you are lucky then they just beat you up, if not they take you and kill you. There is no peace. You just have to lock your doors.

Nina's description invokes a state of oppression, terror, and insecurity. That she would feel fortunate were members of her household only beaten and not killed by state forces highlights the gravity of the perceived threat that the army poses. According to Milan, it seems that children also live in this state of fear, and have learnt that the state army is a sign of danger that must be run away from, rather than protection:

A child of about five years will tell you, that is a military vehicle. They will say they are coming and start running. A child of five years.

Beyond directing us to the trauma that children may be exposed to on the ground in the anglophone regions, this comment also draws our attention to the resources of the state military. Unlike the Amba forces, they have access to military vehicles, in addition to their armour, weapons, and abundant ammunition.

This point of disparity of arms was raised by several of our interviewees in an effort to alert us to how much greater risk the state military posed to them than the Amba forces. Kelvin makes this point in the following way:

The army of *La République* – the army of Paul Biya. The Ambazonians don't have any force. They don't have any guns. It is the military that is moving around in armoured vehicles. They have the guns, they have the money, they have everything.

Of course, as many civilian and human rights organisation reports attest to, it is not the case that Amba fighters have no guns at all, but Kelvin may be referring to the quality of gun, which in general is vastly different. As the independent journalist Emmanuel Freudenthal notes, the Ambazonian Defence Forces (ADF) he spent time with generally use hunting rifles (referred to in our interviews as 'Dane guns'), which are 'cumbersome', taking around a minute to load just one new bullet.<sup>113</sup>

To appreciate the great difference in strength here, consider what Michel tells us: that the Ambazonian fighters began defending their communities simply using makeshift catapults to fire stones.

*La République* has a standing army, a very big standing army. But Ambazonians, as we call ourselves now, we don't have any army, we didn't have anything. Those [Amba] boys . . . have come from nowhere. And they started by shooting with these tools called catapults. Later, then guns. And now, with the fighting, they have seized a lot of guns from [state soldiers] and are now fighting back. We don't have any country supplying us any arms at all. No country is supplying us arms. See?

The catapults referred to here, also locally called 'rubber guns', comprise of a singular large tree branch, shaped like the letter 'Y', with a rubber band placed around the top points of the branch, so that when the band is pulled backwards by two or more people, stones can be propelled on release.<sup>114</sup> Michel further notes that as the conflict has advanced, separatist forces may have been able to ambush soldiers in order to capture better quality weapons. Rather than establishing parity between forces, this underscores the Amba fighters' comparative lack of resources – they must risk their lives even to attain quality firearms when the opportunity presents itself.

What drives this point home is the cultural and spiritual reality of these separatist fighters. As documented by Freudenthal, the Amba boys have a different kind of resource on which they rely: they use a system of magic called 'Odeshi' to protect themselves.<sup>115</sup> Spiritual beliefs and magical protections such as these reflect efforts of the past to make sense of the unfairness and greed of modernity, and were attempts to find peace of mind from the relentless threat of being captured and enslaved.<sup>116</sup> While these forms of protection are important for the Amba, they mark a significant divergence from the resources possessed by the Cameroonian military, which includes

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<sup>113</sup> Freudenthal, E. (2018a). 'Cameroon's anglophone war, part 1: A rifle as the only way out'. *The New Humanitarian* (formerly IRIN). Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2018/06/12/cameroon-s-anglophone-war-part-1-rifle-only-way-out>.

<sup>114</sup> For discussion and images, see Mbiydzenyuy, W. (2018). *Wirba Force: The Force of Truth in Defence of Southern Cameroons*. (Lagos, Nigeria: Sovereign Prints).

<sup>115</sup> Freudenthal, E. (2018b). 'Cameroon's anglophone war, part 2: Inside the separatist conflict'. *The New Humanitarian* (formerly IRIN). Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2018/08/02/cameroon-s-anglophone-war-part-2-inside-separatist-conflict>.

<sup>116</sup> Green, T. (2019). *A fistful of shells: West Africa from the rise of the slave trade to the age of revolution*. (UK: Penguin), p. 278, and Ch 5.

plentiful assault rifles, elite trained forces, and ‘armoured tanks’ (as noted by Kelvin). The show of force by comparison simply dwarfs that of any Ambazonian fighter group, individually and collectively.

It is not surprising, then, that the civilians we spoke with, like Pa Elias below, often did not condemn in the same way the violence and intimidation committed by both parties:

The secessionists or the restorationists, they may target a single person who is an enabler for the government. They may set one house ablaze, but they don’t go burning villages. The army does that. They [the Amba boys] don’t have the capacity to do that.

In addition to the differential capacity to burn entire villages and execute masses of anglophone people, Pa Elias points to a motive behind Amba targets. Rather than killing anyone who might be part of the resistance movement, which all anglophones risk being accused of, the Amba seem to target those who support the government and undermine the Amba cause; a point we return to in due course.

### *Disparities of effect*

The last comment from Pa Elias points to the ability of the state to burn down entire villages, whereas the Amba forces might only burn down a single dwelling. Likewise, the state has the ability to kill in much larger numbers. In the last report, we documented several pieces of footage which appeared to show Cameroon armed forces executing several people, one after the next, and there were multiple pieces of footage purporting to show piles of deceased bodies.<sup>117</sup> One piece of footage was taken from a distance in a rural forest setting, and disturbingly showed a pile of corpses stacked up in a mass grave like a huge bonfire, with armed officers nearby.<sup>118</sup>

Several of our interviewees described cases they knew of personally, through neighbours or through their own direct experience as victims. Pa Elias illustrates the harms:

[I]n November 2017, Paul Biya, the president himself, declared war openly . . . on Southern Cameroon. He said he was declaring war on the secessionists, but it was on Southern Cameroon, because they started burning villages, killing people mercilessly . . . I lost my house. I took so many years to build [it] up. They razed my house down with explosives after looting it, carrying everything, the Cameroon army.

Those thoughts are informed by an intimate connection to ever-present danger:

Just yesterday, in one neighbourhood . . ., somebody left his house, went to town and on his return, he was killed. [The army] went to his house, ransacked the house and burned the house. . . . They have killed many of us when we have done nothing wrong. We have not done anything, but look at the number of soldiers in town, and the number of armoured vehicles, the rate of destruction and killings.

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<sup>117</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 161. See also Ref 005, 170, 246, among others in the Appendix log of *ibid.*

Kelvin talks here about the rate of killings and state ability to pull them off. Many of our participants expressed concern about the number of mass killings of anglophone civilians, and several interviewees shared news that they had personally lost someone close to them. Milan recounted a painful memory of the state military breaking into his house to arrest, beat, and torture several members of his family whom they accused of being Amba fighters. On Milan's account, this led to the killing of his brother and his cousin:

They made us surrender using their guns, took us outside and pulled our clothes off, tied our faces, got us well-beaten, beat us, got us well-beaten, gagged our faces. . . . Then they tortured us, got us well-beaten, to the point that my next brother, the person who was next eldest after me, was beaten to death in front of me. Was beaten to death. In front of me.

Milan recounts how he was eventually released from the police cell, along with his 12-year-old brother, uncle, and two friends. He then spent the rest of the night in a state of confusion moving from the hospital to the police station looking for his elder brother and cousin, both of whom had been killed that night. Scared for his life, Milan fled his home.

Many participants spoke to their fear of further reprisals following state military killings of their family members; several interviewees reported themselves and neighbours fleeing their homes in such cases, including women and children. Other interviewees, such as Esther, informed us that children had been directly killed by state soldiers:

I have lost everything. I have lost my brother's children and my sister's children. Even my own [children], they have burned them, and they have shot them. Those people don't care. Even when you beg, they will still kill you. As the days go by, the situation remains the same. Even yesterday, it was the same. Every day they destroy people, go to a house and kill about eight people, including pregnant women.

This kind of information is unfortunately neither new nor exceptional.<sup>119</sup> As noted in our last report, the state has been credibly accused of unlawful executions and torture of civilians, even of the most vulnerable.<sup>120</sup>

Notably, all of the killings reported to us were committed by the state military forces, and the victims of the crimes were said to be unarmed civilians. Thus, a point of contrast here is that though credible reports and evidence of Amba killings do exist, such killings may well be much fewer in number. Given the common narrative that both parties are committing equivalent atrocities, in terms of sheer numbers this is likely to be very wide of the mark.

Perhaps one reason why the military is accused of killing so many people is a mindset which justifies disproportionate violence in response to attacks on state forces. The most recent alleged massacre in Small Babanki, mentioned above, is a case in point: per Communication Minister Rene

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<sup>119</sup> See the latest Cameroon report by the US State Department. United States Department of State. (2020). 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019'. Retrieved 28/03/2020 from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cameroon/>.

<sup>120</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.*, paras. 60-66.

Sadi's own account,<sup>121</sup> the military action was a retaliation to a separatist attack which killed two people, one of whom was a soldier. The massacre in response killed at least ten people, only one of whom was reported by civilians to be a separatist fighter. This tallies with how Pa Elias spoke of the state violence:

[W]hen government gets to a village, if they say there was one restorationist, one boy of the restorationist forces in that area, they burn the whole village to punish the people who don't even know about such a boy in their village.

It thus far remains unclear what motivates the kind of disproportionate retaliation Pa Elias here describes (if, indeed, 'retaliation' is not mere pretext, as many civilians accuse it of being).

### *Disparities of fearfulness*

Given the scale and frequency of violence in the conflict, it is not surprising that the language many civilians use is fraught with fear, confusion, and despair. Our interviewees in some cases feared both the state security forces and the Ambazonian militia, such as Blasius:

I am able to speak like this because I am far away from anywhere they [the army] can hear me. If I were any place where they could hear me, be it any of the parties [the Amba or the military], I would not be speaking.

However, it is worth noting that while our interviewees uniformly express fear of state forces, their response to armed separatists varies. Many viewed the Amba as their protectors, as addressed in the final section of this chapter; no one described the state in this way.

When a large majority of our interviewees spoke of state violence and intimidation, they sound tones of an especially deep and desperate fear:

I have one thing that I would like as a plea. . . . [Y]ou confided in me that my information is really, is kept confidential. I know the country in which we are. I plea that it really should be kept confidential because if they hear about it then . . . if they get another information that I have sent out things like that, then it might be even maybe that my entire family may be wiped out. So, I am praying that really it should be confidential.

Indeed, such fear may not be unwarranted. After the massacre in Ngarbuh, a key whistle-blower whom the UN interviewed about the tragedy had, according to reports, gone missing or been killed in Bui.<sup>122</sup> While these reports are yet to be verified, the existence and spread of the allegation underscores the reality that civilians do believe their government has both the capacity and the will to murder whistle-blowers.

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<sup>121</sup> Journal du Cameroun. (2020c). 'Cameroon: government reacts on Babanki killings'. Retrieved on 05/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-government-reacts-on-babanki-killings/>.

<sup>122</sup> For example, see Journal du Cameroun. (2020a). 'Cameroon: Alleged eye witness of Ngarbuh killings murdered in Bui'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-alleged-eye-witness-of-ngarbuh-killings-murdered-in-bui/>.

Nina describes the situation as especially ominous and fraught with danger: ‘There are disappearances. There is an uncountable military influx’. The US State Department report on human rights abuses in Cameroon for the year 2019 likewise notes disappearances, among many other crimes.<sup>123</sup> Kelvin explains how the arbitrary and constant nature of the threat pervades his and his neighbours’ lives: ‘as I’m speaking, on my way back home, they could strike me down or they could come and get me out of the house and kill me’. Our research participants thus gave us the impression of a terrifying, dangerous, and unaccountable state, from which anglophone civilians critically need protection.

### *Disparities of spin*

Another form of power that the state has in comparison to the Amba forces, and anglophones more generally, is the ability to control the narrative; the state has the means to publicise certain versions of events and resources to make these accounts the legitimate ones. For example, the state has access to the national media outputs, the ability to publicise statements on behalf of Cameroon, and the power to dismiss, ignore, and deny the lived experiences of those consigned to the warzones. Moreover, the vast financial resources of the state create possibilities to offer financial incentives in return for favourable witness accounts. Indeed, there are undoubtedly also biased accounts and forms of manipulation of truth on the Amba sides too;<sup>124</sup> however, the means for the Amba forces to legitimise their version of events, to make their version of events be taken as the correct one, are far fewer. These differences of power must be acknowledged.

The pain of being unable to shape the narrative, and having personal experiences denied, is evident in some of our interviewees’ claims. For example, Frank alleges that he saw the military burn down a school, and yet straight afterwards, the military apparently blamed the action on the Amba fighters:

We saw the military passing with cars and going to school, and after that, they said that they were Amba boys who came and burnt the school. We were thinking, how did the Amba boys get there when the military were present? Could they have jumped from above and burnt the school without the military arresting them?

Kelvin described a similar event:

For example, when we go to the market, they will burn the market and then turn around and accuse our children of burning the market, when really it was the soldiers. Then they go to the hospitals, burn the hospitals and accuse our children of doing that too. They commit all types of atrocities against us.

Beyond the military’s field-based deception, the state also has access to official channels, with which it may deny or downplay its involvement in a given atrocity such as those described by Kelvin. Citizens, as well as armed separatists, necessarily cannot do so to anything like the same extent.

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<sup>123</sup> United States Department of State, *ibid.*, esp. §1b.

<sup>124</sup> We pointed to this in the former report, Willis et al., *ibid.*

A stark example of state denial relates to the crimes against humanity committed during the Ngarbuh massacre. Despite significant testimonial evidence collected by HRW, the Cameroon state has consistently denied wrongdoing. Their denial has included claims that the deaths were the result of an accident involving fuel canisters, and a further accusation that secessionist fighters disguised themselves as elite military forces.<sup>125</sup> Meanwhile, the Cameroon state news agency, CRTV, has publicised that the HRW report relied on a lone, biased source; and, further, that the report was removed by the organisation from its website.<sup>126</sup> These claims, however, are false, as a senior researcher at the organisation subsequently pointed out publicly.<sup>127</sup> Since then, the Minister of Territorial Administration, Paul Atanga Nji, has cast aspersions on a number of non-governmental organisations and news outlets critical of the Cameroon government, including HRW, Amnesty, and the International Crisis Group.<sup>128</sup>

Denial of wrongdoing is a key strategy of war, and both the Cameroon state and militarised elements of the oppositional movement have been accused of doing it.<sup>129</sup> But through use of official channels, it is a strategy the state and its forces can conduct to greater effect. One consequence, then, is compounded harm: denial, along with the spreading of false information, exacerbates the psychological injury and trauma inflicted on victims and forces them to remain in a state of ‘proving’ the crime, instead of permitting them space to heal. Patience describes its effect:

The people are suffering. Burning there, killing here, innocent children that know nothing, women, pregnant women and others, everybody is affected in one way or the other, but the government is doing nothing, saying nothing, and all you hear is lies. You see something happening like this, and everybody’s witnessing it; then he [Paul Biya] will say, ‘No, this thing never happened.’ So, it is killing us.

Moreover, by derailing public discourse so that it fails to condemn unequivocally the wrongness of the crime, denial creates an atmosphere of invincibility for violent actors, making conditions ripe for the commission of further crimes. Indeed, as noted above, within two weeks of the Ngarbuh massacre, similar reports of mass killing by the Cameroon state emerged from the village of Small Babanki. (Civilian sources have alleged that the victims were predominantly innocent

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<sup>125</sup> See the press briefing from Communication Minister, Rene Sadi: Sadi, R. (2020). ‘Press Briefing on Allegations Against Defence and Security Forces’. Retrieved on 08/03/2020 from [https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PRESS-BRIEFING-ON-ALLEGATIONS-AGAINST-DEFENCE-AND-SECURITY-FORCES\\_EN.pdf](https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PRESS-BRIEFING-ON-ALLEGATIONS-AGAINST-DEFENCE-AND-SECURITY-FORCES_EN.pdf).

<sup>126</sup> CRTVweb. (2020). *Facebook*. Retrieved on 08/03/2020 from <https://www.facebook.com/CRTVweb/videos/823067398212826/>.

<sup>127</sup> Allegrozzi, I. (2020a). *Twitter*. Retrieved on 08/03/2020 from <https://twitter.com/ilariiallegro/status/1234941638394425350/>.

<sup>128</sup> Journal du Cameroun. (2020b). ‘Atanga Nji accuses International NGOs of fueling terrorism in Cameroon’. Retrieved on 09/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/atanga-nji-accuses-international-ngos-of-fueling-terrorism-in-cameroon/>.

<sup>129</sup> Willis et al., *ibid*.

civilians, among them women and a breastfeeding mother;<sup>130</sup> the official government response claims the victims were Ambazonian fighters.<sup>131</sup>)

### 2.3. The Power of the State and Mechanisms of Aggression

What the language of moral equivalence also conceals is the fact that ‘one side’ in a civil conflict such as this operates as a state. In addition to the added strength which this gives one of the parties in terms of financial and physical strength, it also means that a certain apparatus is available to the state which is unavailable to non-state actors.

#### *Extending the business of extortion*

Before the outbreak of the conflict, state institutions in Cameroon widely functioned through a logic of extortion, in which citizens were frequently required to make informal payments to civil servants in order to access state services. Bernard’s frustrations express that reality well:

You aren’t treated the way you are supposed to be treated in an office, so you can’t just go once and get the thing you want. You must do certain things, perhaps pay a bribe, you must give some money and even on your way to the office, when you have all of your documents and you are on the road, you are forced to pay some money and sometimes at checkpoints they will complain about something and then when you show them your documents, they will ask you to just show them one of those documents, and when you do, they will ask you to give them some money.

Bernard’s experience illuminates the pre-existing power imbalance, and thus the very strained relationship, between citizens and representatives of the state. What we have noticed in analysing civilian interview data is that these unequal relations continue to structure interactions between citizens and state representatives, but in even more regular and exploitative ways.

As Tatiana reveals, state soldiers have continued the usual practice of holding documents and extorting money from civilians, but now the soldiers can also demand access to personal phones to demand additional money:

At times they seize your ID, they ask for money, they seize your phone, and when at times when they see that you have [mobile phone credit], they will force you to [unlock the mobile phone], and when they see [credit] there, they will force the person to send it to their phone.

Sometimes those held captive, like Milan, are simply extorted through ransom for their release, even without the pretext of state checks on documents:

I was in the house [that day,] since the military had chosen it as their own ‘ghost town’, . . . I left for the court, and the military happened to meet me on the way. They picked me [up] and

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<sup>130</sup> Cameroon News Agency. (2020a). ‘Only Ambazonia General Was Killed In Small Babanki, The Rest Were Civilians-Witnesses’. Retrieved on 05/03/2020 from <http://cameroonnewsagency.com/only-ambazonia-general-was-killed-in-small-babanki-the-rest-were-civilians-witnesses/>.

<sup>131</sup> Journal du Cameroun, *ibid.* (2020c).



put me in their car, . . . took me to [a holding location]. They kept me there. I was well-beaten. . . . They said that if I did not pay [a very large sum of money], they would not leave me.

Rather than being arrested and charged, Milan describes falling victim to a form of state kidnaping, which seems to be an even more immediate way to extort than through soliciting a bribe in exchange for ID. What price the state forces require captive anglophones to pay for release seems to vary on perceived wealth, according to Tatiana: ‘When they see . . . you have money, they will chase you and take all of your money. . . . But when you don’t have, they ask for 25,000 [francs], until people come and run and pay before they release you’.

The pretext of detainment for Wilfried was his alleged support for the Amba boys, even though he told us he had never knowingly met any and was eventually determined not to support them:

The conditions were very sad. I don’t think even animals can be kept and tied the way we were tied. . . . We received beatings; they hit us with machetes and chained every day. They used to untie us for two hours in twenty hours to give food. [And] they give you raw cassava or semi-cooked rice, boiled only with salt to eat.

Wilfried gives us an insight into the inhumane – animalistic – conditions of detentions for those accused of being part of the Amba forces. The Cameroon state is widely documented to implement methods of torture on prisoners, which were prevalent before the conflict, and have worsened in form and force since then.<sup>132</sup>

Beyond arbitrary detention and torture, we also discovered that during kidnappings, not only did state security forces physically abuse, malnourish, and extort anglophone civilians, but according to two women with direct experience, they committed sexual violence to their detainees also. Grace shared her traumatising experience after soldiers had burnt down her relative’s house and then held her in the police station. According to Grace, when she went to the police station to check on her relative, a gendarmerie lieutenant detained her, and she was repeatedly raped:

When I went there, the lieutenant I think, yes, the lieutenant of that gendarmerie, when he saw me, he had to add me to my relative, we were both locked up. So, that night, I could not sleep because I was repeatedly raped. [Grace begins to cry.] And they demanded [an exceptionally large] ransom. But finally, we paid [a reduced amount] because of what the man did, he said, since he got what he wanted from me, I can go without paying . . . . But I was repeatedly raped. [Grace breaks down in tears again.] It seems as if 80 percent of my body has been thrown away.

We do not have information to confirm how common this is, or what profile of civilian has been targeted in this way. Tatiana, a 50-year-old woman, suggests that the profile is not significant for the state forces:

At times, they even rape, like, as a female, if you are passing, at times they will catch you and rape you. It’s just everybody, no matter their age or sex.

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<sup>132</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.* See also United States Department of State, *ibid.* (2020), esp. §1.

As discussed in our prior report, human rights organisations have noted the worrying rise in use of sexual violence as a strategy of war by Cameroon state forces.<sup>133</sup> The information we received to date has not included similar allegations about oppositional groups, and our previous report did not find rape to be a commonly reported crime committed by Amba fighters in the human rights reports we analysed.<sup>134</sup> This is not to suggest that sexual violence is not committed by the Amba forces, but it is plausible that state officials are actively using rape in a particular way, as a method of war to humiliate and traumatise the anglophone population more broadly.

From what many of our participants have told us, we can glean a connection between mass arson attacks and extortion. It has been known for some time that using fire to destroy homes and villages has been a regular occurrence in the Cameroon conflict. Cameroonian security forces – in particular, the BIR – have reportedly engaged in a systematic campaign of terror against anglophone communities, burning down hundreds of structures such as homes, businesses, and local government buildings.<sup>135</sup> In 2018, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, based in Cameroon, reported that 106 towns and villages in the anglophone regions were targeted with arson attacks and have had their inhabitants either partially or completely flee the area since the conflict began.<sup>136</sup> Further, other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch (HRW),<sup>137</sup> Amnesty International,<sup>138</sup> and BBC News Africa<sup>139</sup> independently report that security forces have caused property damage through mass arson. These allegations have been verified by eyewitness testimony, video evidence, and/or satellite images showing destroyed structures.

In keeping with these accounts, many of our research participants had lost their homes to fire and were experiencing homelessness, as we discussed in Chapter 1. Pa Elias's house was completely destroyed: 'Not only my house, but my quarter. About ten houses were destroyed in November and December 2018.' But what is also notable is what happens after such incidents: civilians who have often lost their homes to fire likewise lose their official identification documents, or 'books' as some of our participants refer to them in Pidgin. Pa Fabian is in this situation: 'Everything has been burnt in my house. They burnt all my identification papers.' Without means to replace official documents, because of both financial hardship and anglophone court closures, victims of arson are then made susceptible to further aggravation by soldiers who demand to see such documents,

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<sup>133</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.*, para. 68; United States Department of State, *ibid.* (2020), §6.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> O'Grady, S. (2019). 'Divided by Language: Cameroon's Crackdown on its English-Speaking Minority is fuelling a secessionist Movement'. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved on 04/03/2020 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/cameroon-anglophone-crisis/>.

<sup>136</sup> Journal du Cameroun. (2018). 'Rights group says over 100 villages burnt in Cameroon's Anglophone regions'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/rights-group-says-100-villages-burnt-camerouns-anglophone-regions/>.

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2019a). 'Cameroon: New Attacks on Civilians by Troops, Separatists: At Least 170 Killed; Hundreds of Homes Burned' Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists>.

<sup>138</sup> Amnesty International. (2017a). 'A turn for the worse: Violence and human rights abuses in Cameroon', pp. 23-27. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR1784812018ENGLISH.PDF>.

<sup>139</sup> BBC News Africa. (2018). 'Cameroon Burning: The Unseen War – Full Documentary – BBC Africa Eye'. *YouTube*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct\\_SLnAGDuM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct_SLnAGDuM).

and to extortion when they inevitably cannot provide them. This is a problem Blasius is familiar with: 'if they lay hands on me or [my family], I won't have anything to say because all my identification papers have been burnt in my house.'

The trap of not being able to provide documents after having them destroyed, and so having to pay arbitrary fines, led several of our interviewees to accuse state officials of opportunistically using the conflict to make significant personal gains. This was made explicit by Wilfried:

So, how do they make money from the struggle? They seize money from people, they brutalise people to take money. Like the policemen in [my hometown], they are out for their money. They don't care. They are only interested in money. They say that we invited them to come [by starting the protests and violence], so they are coming to make their money.

Likewise, Lambert spells out the extortion mechanism and overarching monetary incentive:

[Colonels] simply come and arrest whoever they deem fit and take to detention centres and keep there for one or two weeks. And when you pay money, you are released. That is business. If you tell [police forces] that the war is ended, they would tell you that it has not ended, even if the Amba fighters are not still there. They are feeding fat from it. From the police officers to soldiers to colonels to Defence Minister, and even other government ministers involved in the conflict are feeding fat from it.

Not only does Lambert point to the localised mechanism of state extortion, he points to the larger structure, which, he says, is replicated at the level of the most powerful of elites.

### ***Elections and the facade of state legitimacy***

Another area of state violence and intimidation concerns elections. Elections are a central part of a functioning liberal state and indicate that a government has legitimacy by operating for or by the will of the people. In accord with this ideology, democratically elected governments are considered justified to distribute the collective resources of the nation. Internationally, a state's position as a trade partner with, or recipient of aid and general good will from, other states may also depend on the appearance of legitimacy; democratic governance is required for a state to garner support from international institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF. Despite being in the midst of conflict, several elections have taken place in the anglophone regions of Cameroon (including the presidential in 2018, and municipal and legislative in 2020). Rather than a sign of 'good governance', however, our research indicates that recent elections have been another source of violence and trauma for anglophone populations.

Our interviewees were unanimous that genuine elections had not taken place in the anglophone regions. Despite ritual displays of elections by the state, such as the presence of ballot boxes and the issuance of voter cards, our interviewees were adamant that they had not voted, and nor had anyone else that they knew. This common position is explained by Tatiana and Patience respectively:

That election, it has never taken place where I am. Because, in the North-West and South-West region, it did not take place, although the reports show that there was an election. But it never took place. On the day of the election, everyone was indoors. There was no movement. It did not take place.

I myself did not even dream of going out because the atmosphere was really tense. Military cars everywhere, gunshots. So, I can say, I don't know if an election took place here. I cannot – because, nobody, I saw nobody going out for that.

As their experiences reveal, the recent elections were marred by violence and low turnout. The security forces were deployed in anglophone regions, ostensibly for the protection of civilians;<sup>140</sup> however, many civilians we spoke with did not view the military as a source of protection but were there to attack and were a deterrent to vote. Take, for instance, Dominic, who believed that he 'would have been killed if [he] went out to vote'. Consequently, Milan informed us how this led many to go into hiding during the elections:

[T]he population [in certain villages] left the place and went to the bushes. Because they were going saying that they had to go for their safety, since if the military comes and you go out to vote, they will brutalise you, or they will burn your house.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that our interviewees scorned the elections. Both in the present and more generally.<sup>141</sup> According to Nina, 'there have never been any fair elections in Cameroon, not one fair election'. Michel, like several others, laughs the moment we mention them: 'These elections... I laughed because there are no elections in Cameroon. Every election in Cameroon is always predestined, is pre-arranged. And it's only there for fun.' The overall sentiment was captured by Pa Elias: 'the election was a complete farce'.

Our interviewees also reported that there had been coercion to try and make them vote. According to Milan, the elections 'have been manipulated at every level' – for one thing, he says, the army uses armed coercion to force citizens to vote: 'I don't know how you can expect civilians to go and vote, if you are carrying some other persons in armoured cars to go and vote'. Coercion may also have been applied in indirect forms, such as by offering food to starving populations in return for voting. Consider Esther's example, described in Chapter 1, in which soldiers were giving out bags of rice only to those who voted. Despite her hunger, Esther told us, '[w]e refused the food and said, if the reason for bringing the food was for us to submit before taking the food, we are not ready.'

Others, such as Ozias, informed us about how the state apparatus of extortion, examined above, was also manipulated to force people to vote:

This election [just gone] – the municipal and parliamentary election – they have already started arresting people about a month ago. When the people were arrested, their identity cards were taken from them. The lucky ones would pay them 25,000 francs each before they were released. But for the national identity cards, they informed them that they could only get them back only

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<sup>140</sup> Journal du Cameroun. (2020d). 'Cameroon elections overshadowed by violence, boycott'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-elections-overshadowed-by-violence-boycott-3/>.

<sup>141</sup> Even prior to the elections, there was good reason to be suspicious that they would play any peacebuilding role. See Ngah Kiven, G. & Hendricks, C. (2020). 'Why upcoming polls in Cameroon won't end the violence'. *The Conversation*. Retrieved 01/04/2020 from <https://theconversation.com/why-upcoming-polls-in-cameroon-wont-end-the-violence-131160>.

on the day of the elections during when the voting was happening. The soldiers said, ‘And when you come and you don’t vote, you will not have any identity card. And if you can’t find your identity card, you’ll pay huge sums in the days to come.’

The interweaving of extortion, violence, and coercion by the state under the guise of democratic governance adds to the injury inflicted upon anglophone citizens. Like the denial of harms, addressed above, the state’s insistence that elections had taken place and their announcement of results further undermine the lived realities of citizens in these regions. Unfortunately, this is Anthony’s experience:

That is the worst part, these elections. They had announced that there would be no election and that there would be a lockdown. So, on that day, all of us were in our houses, but they have gone and announced over the radio that they had voted in the North-West and South-West, when nobody actually voted in reality. Now, I don’t have the voter card, I don’t have anything, because everything of mine has been burnt in the house. So, how was I going to vote? But they announced that we have voted.

Adamu reflects on his people being used as a political prop in a time of crisis – being advertised to the nation or the world as supporting the President when he and no-one he knew had voted at all:

The election has disturbed us a lot. Everywhere was locked and we were in the house. And we were surprised to hear that he [Biyā] has won. What has he won? What has he won when nobody voted for him? So, we don’t know who voted for him to win. We were really surprised. That’s not how elections should be done. We are in difficulties, but he is just fighting to have elections. While we are asking for dialogue, he is just fighting to have elections. Is that his own way to do dialogue?

In the context of an undressed conflict, recurring state violence, and ongoing lifechanging injuries, many of our interviewees could not understand why the elections had gone ahead in the first place. ‘We cannot understand anything about the elections’, said Godfrey. ‘I am not happy, because I am living in the bush, so I cannot talk about elections again.’ Wendy points out that elections cannot grant a solution to the current tensions:

They have done the elections, but I don’t really see how that can bring out a solution to the crisis. There are issues which hurt the anglophones which have provoked this thing, so if what provoked the crisis has not been solved, I don’t see how elections can provide a solution.<sup>142</sup>

Listening to these civilian voices, elections are seen as an absurdity, which to their minds have always been this way, and ones that in the throes of violence swirling their lives are especially pointless. Holding elections without any serious attempt to manage the ongoing conflict illustrates the state’s indifference to the needs of anglophone groups. Actors that value democratic

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<sup>142</sup> Wendy, 46 years of age, village trader.

governance ought to acknowledge these civilian voices and recognise the Cameroonian elections for what they paradoxically were: a show of power, coercion, and state aggression.

### *Denial of anglophone education*

While much has been said of Amba fighter lockdowns on schools and violent responses to those who violate them,<sup>143</sup> comparatively little has been written of similar state activities. However, our interviewees reported that Cameroon state security forces had been violent towards teachers and schoolchildren, and that they intimidated children away from attending school. Anthony shows how the actions of the state pose material and practical barriers to school attendance:

Some of our children have been transferred to [a francophone town] for school. Some of them are just living with us because they don't have a way to go just to the nearest primary schools. Because the army comes and sends all of the children away from school. When the children see the army, they run away. How can they go to school? The worst part is that all of the houses have been burnt; where can the children stay before they go to school?

Ozias agrees: 'formerly, when they went to school, they were not seeing soldiers. . . . [Now], they will not go to school, because they are scared of being shot.' Despite these dangers, some are trying to educate in discreet ways. Michel is managing to do some teaching privately, but he specifically cites which group opposes him:

The government is still against it. Even UNICEF came in, and created some – what you call – a 'child-friendly' place. They were created, and we were asked to teach there. But the government officials wrote orders . . . for us to close them down. And since then, they have not opened.

The Cameroon government, then, is alleged of preventing the operation of schools set up by international actors. The state may be preventing international support in order to block encroachments on the state's power to exert control over anglophone educational provisions. Kelvin also noticed that civilian attempts to rectify the education problem were stamped out by government forces:

When we try to gather children in what is now known as 'community school', the school will be open for about two months, and then he [Biya] will dispatch his soldiers to send the children away and then burn the school down. There is no school, but they move around telling people there is school. . . . The francophone government does not care about [anglophone] education. [Biya] is travelling in other countries and saying that the schools here are open, but in reality, they are not.

These revelations are significant because the greater the number of such school closures by the state, the weaker their narrative that the state is committed to the education even of the anglophones. Even more seriously, state forces are accused of an arson attack on a school in Widikum, as per an investigation submitted to the Open-Source Investigations Lab at the Human

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<sup>143</sup> See the following section of this chapter for more information.

Rights Centre in the School of Law at UC Berkeley purports.<sup>144</sup> The idea, then, that the current education crisis is caused only by violent separatists is extremely dubious, and the Cameroon government ought not to be able to gain legitimacy with the international community by presenting it. For if what Kelvin and Michel are saying is replicated in other cases, it constitutes a deliberate, sustained, and far-reaching attack on the civilian anglophones by the state.

## 2.4. The Amba as Defenders?

Commentators are right to call out the crimes that have been carried out in the name of the Amba cause and to condemn members of the Amba forces who commit horrific acts. However, the violence of the Amba movement must also be understood in the context of a recent history of inordinate oppression and a necessity to defend. After all, the violence of the Amba movement can be seen to have emerged in response to violence of the state, escalating from protests with peace branches, to catapults with stones, to eventual armed resistance. Indeed, this is how a majority of our interviewees explained the emergence of the Amba movement to us: as one that has grown in defence of anglophone communities.

In keeping with the motive of defence, the principal targets of the Amba forces have been representatives of the state and state institutions. Of course, as several reports credibly attest to, the Amba have also targeted civilians. But rather than indiscriminately harming civilians, the armed members of the Amba forces seem primarily to attack them when they fail to show perceived solidarity with the Amba cause as they construe it. This is not to say that such attacks are justifiable – far from it. However, there is a logic to the Amba crimes, which appear to be more ordered and less indiscriminate when compared to the crimes of the state.

### *Solidarity with the Amba cause*

There was a marked level of support for the Amba cause among our research participants. Particularly, the most passionate support for the Amba cause came from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged of our interviewees. Conversely, the interviewees who were most critical of the Amba cause were among the most socioeconomically advantaged in our sample. Overall, our interviewees were overwhelmingly in support of the Amba fighters and their plight for the independence of the anglophone parts of Cameroon. Many research participants expressed heartfelt appreciation towards the Amba, whom they described as their only protectors. This general position is captured in the following comments:

These are our Amba boys at ‘ground zero’. . . . We think very well of them. We know that they are struggling, and we are thinking good things about them.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Fobia, E. (2020). ‘Verified incident: School burning in Eka’. *Scholars Portal Dataverse*, V3. Retrieved 19/03/2020 from <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP2/QF5HP7>.

<sup>145</sup> Pascal, 53 years of age, security guard.

If not for them [the Amba fighters], we would not be alive. If they were not there, many people would have died. Even though there's a lot of people who have died, if they were not there, many more would have died.<sup>146</sup>

They are the ones fighting to separate, and they are the ones defending us. In truth, they are defending us. If they were not there, we would have all been killed.<sup>147</sup>

From the perspective of these and other interviewees, then, the Amba fighters were a defensive force. Several, including Tatiana below, had spoken of Amba fighters coming out of hiding when gunshots were heard:

I know that if the military remains calm and stays in one place without moving about, there will be no problem. Because, at times, when you hear gun shooting in some places, they are passing, and the boys, the Amba, when they come into contact with the Amba at times, you hear serious gun shooting, because of [the military's] movement. If [the military] don't go out, moving carelessly, or to the other places [anglophone regions], [the Amba] will be calm. But, I know that when they are walking on their own, they still shoot, when the Amba are not there. Myself, I blame mostly the military.

Ozias identifies this same pattern of behaviour:

The Amba boys are just there to help. When they hear the sound of guns, and people are running away, and they realise that soldiers are looting people's property, it's at that time that they try to come to defend.

According to Ozias, a government official in the area in which he lives ordered a meeting in an attempt to respond to this situation:

The then-SDO [senior divisional officer] summoned a meeting including church leaders, traditional leaders, economic operators, and heads of services. Even the Lord Mayor and his entourage and party leaders. What was agreed was that soldiers should not fire guns, because they provoke what is happening. When they shoot the guns, it's like an invitation for the Amba boys to come out. Three days after the meeting, the soldiers started shooting again. The red caps [gendarmes] started firing their guns. So when the Amba boys saw that there were lots of killings and that houses were being burned, they came to try to defend and stop the burning.

Thus, there seems to be a communal understanding that if the state military were to keep away from anglophone communities, or did not provocatively shoot their guns, then there would be fewer violent incidents.

Notably, support for the Amba was greater and near unconditional from individuals who were in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and precarious positions. This likely stems from at least two factors. First, as we have shown up to this point, the most disadvantaged among the anglophone populations have been disproportionately harmed in this dispute – by living in rural

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<sup>146</sup> Blasius, 49 years of age, herbalist. See also Tatiana, 50 years of age, farmer: 'The Amba boys are there, they are there protecting. If not for them, I think we couldn't have been alive by now.'

<sup>147</sup> Pa Fabian, mid-70s, farmer.



areas, they are most at risk of being accused of being Amba fighters and hence targeted by the state military; moreover, they are least likely to be able to find alternative means for survival when all is lost in village burnings, and so on. Their precarious conditions may create a breeding ground for oppositional support, as well as generating greater need for defenders. Second, relatedly, those on the ground fighting for the Amba cause appear predominantly to consist of individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Patience, for example, offers the following account of the Amba fighters:

[T]hey have never dreamt of even seeing a gun, [let alone] holding a gun when you are not in the military. But when [the military] started invading our homes, killing, doing this, and they just need to go an extra mile to see what they can do, to see that they are people and not to target [and] eliminate [them] from the surface of the Earth. So, some of them, they went the extra mile, made themselves to be called Amba boys, just to help, to help protect their family. So, I can say they are, they are, if they were not there, maybe even a single soul would not be in this Southern side of us. It is, they are really helping, to a certain degree, though they have their own errors that they are committing, but, to a greater extent, they are protecting us, though they at times go out of hand.

Wendy further proposes that the lives taken by the violence, and the pain and anger it creates, has given some young people an impetus to join the Amba fight:

Many youths have joined the Amba boys not because they like it but because of the brutality they have witnessed. Many have seen their fathers and mothers killed right in front of them. That anger has pushed them to join the armed groups and many of them have become thieves. What drives them into this behaviour at times is lack.

The idea that some youths who take up arms will be those who lost family and friends in the conflict seems plausible. As Freudenthal's interviews with Amba fighters also show, the personal journey from farmer to fighter is likely a well-trodden path: after having family members killed, or a whole village destroyed, those with next to nothing left in life may join the armed resistance. Moreover, as discussed above, those who are most disadvantaged are also most supportive of the Amba fighters, seeing them principally as defenders; this may make the path an easier one to walk. Accordingly, if the international community is keen to prevent violent eruptions in anglophone Cameroon, it would be worth giving serious attention to the motivating forces behind armed resistance.

In contrast to rural anglophone interviewees, those of greater advantage were more likely to be ambivalent about the Amba fighters. Indeed, a handful of relatively well-off individuals, including professionals, informed us that they had personally been targeted by the Amba fighters and extorted for money. Anglophone Cameroonians in this position – what we might call the middle class – described their situation as being caught in the middle: they were at once targeted by the Amba for funds to support the movement, while at the same time targeted by the state for being Amba supporters or fighters. Judith describes feeling as though she had no support:

Things became worse for us because we found ourselves in the middle of the military and the Amba boys. At one point we realised that the military were not there to protect us as they claimed. . . . The Amba boys also started kidnapping people and the military I thought I could

I could run to were asking me funny questions. So, I thought of what would happen if I were kidnapped or if the military came and insisted that I was cooking food for those boys. So I just relocated to where I am, that is how I found myself here.

The powerlessness of finding oneself caught in this position is explained by Wendy through analogy:

The only thing I can say is that we are like the grass that is suffering from the fight between two elephants. We are caught in the middle.

Combined, these experiences reveal the complex situation in which some anglophones, particularly those with backgrounds of relative wealth, could find themselves. Being relatively wealthy, they are kidnapping targets for the Amba movement, who can fund their resistance efforts through ransom. But the normal recourse to dealing with this situation – looking to the state for protection or response – is not an option. In these instances, the description of being ‘caught in the middle’ might be an apt one, but it is far from a universal experience.

This situation differs, then, from that of the most marginalised of our interviewees – those with the least access to resources and those least able to benefit from the apparatus of the state, who found themselves protected by the Amba fighters. Without any meaningful support from the international community, the Amba fighters do indeed seem to be their only defenders.

### ***Amba targets: symbols of the state and defectors of the cause***

Amba violence can be extreme and horrifying; specific killings or cases of torture are frequently as repellent as those committed by state forces. A prominent difference, however, is the kind of target. Our research to date indicates that on the whole the Amba forces seem to target state representatives and institutions.<sup>148</sup> However, there have been occasions when civilians have been targeted. It seems to us that when civilians are targeted by the Amba forces, it relates to a perceived breach of an Amba norm, such as to follow a ‘ghost town’ lockdown or boycott of state schooling. This is not to detract from the wrongfulness of violence committed in these instances, but it does point to a rationale that appears to us more ordered and less dangerous overall to the population than the actions of the Cameroon state.

To begin, let us reflect on Roland’s criticisms of the Amba forces:

Six months after they [Amba fighters] came back and accused me of riding a good car, staying in a big house while they are suffering in the bush. I asked them what they wanted, and they said they didn’t want to see those are enjoying, that I should leave [hometown, where] so many have been displaced and moved out. I know three cases – two men and a woman – whose legs and arms were amputated [chopped off by the separatist fighters]. At one time I was there and saw them cutting the fingers.

Roland describes being ostracised for visible wealth, while others from the same community met with extreme violence. It may be teased out, in this case, that the fighters deemed the wealth and

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<sup>148</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.*

comfort enjoyed by some in the region as offensive because it fails, in their view, to express solidarity with the Ambazonian cause, ‘while they are suffering in the bush’. Moreover, it nods towards extorting wealthier anglophone civilians in order to fund the wider cause.

That is to motivation, but there is latent here a potentially characteristic method also. We do not know if the victims of severe attacks, described by Roland, were likewise given advance warning, but analysis of our interviews reveals that it is not uncommon for Amba fighters to pre-warn before acting. Frederick explains how separatist fighters punished him and his colleagues for failing to respect, unwittingly, an Amba lockdown:

[W]hen I was going for work, when the separatists had imposed that we should not move, . . . we met these separatist fighters who removed us from the car. There were five of us. They shot two people dead there. . . . We thought that going there, in the western part, was not part of the conflict area. . . . By the time we [arrived], we were caught head-to-head with the Amba boys, who caught us; they were annoyed at us, they did not ask us where we were going, but they just pounced on us. They said that we were moving, and they have to deal with us.

The apparent rationale for these (ultimately unjustified) murders is that the area through which Frederick moved was ordered by Amba fighters to be a restricted zone. It seems that many violent or intimidating incidents suffered by civilians at the hands of separatist militia have a similar rationale (which might afford explanation but should not be confused with justification). Frederick offers his view on what happens when a civilian is seen to be working with the state military in any way:

Now, if the separatists have an idea that you’re working with the military, then you are finished. They will just kill you. Or sometimes . . . they will take you to the camp and torture you . . . [E.g.] the Ambaz are saying that, ‘Okay by 5 o’clock [p.m.], everybody should be at home because there’s first the military in the street.’ And they are calling on a lockdown. The government is saying there will be no lockdown. So, if you misbehave in this kind of space then you find yourself to be blamed.

It is striking how notions here invoked of correct and incorrect behaviour, of action that violates a norm of solidarity, portray a structure to separatist violence that is intrinsically related to a particular secessionist or restorationist vision. That is, the Cameroon state and its encroachments into anglophone civil life (which sparked the fuse on this conflict) is in their view to be rejected, via its institutions, roles, and civilian orders. Where the state through its military demands anglophone civil servants to return to work, separatist fighters impose a lockdown, or vice versa.<sup>149</sup>

This theme of solidarity as a lived protest against the state goes to the heart and beginning of the violence: ‘in solidarity with those [imprisoned striking teachers and lawyers] who were suffering, the parents . . . would keep their children at home, and they wouldn’t send them to school’. Indeed, what Michel says there tallies with what human rights organisations acknowledge – that armed secessionist violence particularly targets those suspected of collusion with the state, breaking

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<sup>149</sup> Although civilians are too easily grouped together as being ‘stuck in the middle’ – see the prior section – it is undeniable that some, like Frederick, do find themselves in exactly that predicament.

secessionist-backed strikes or school shutdowns, or criticising secessionist policies or actions.<sup>150</sup> The perceived breaking with solidarity also seems to prompt separatist arson attacks. This appears to be why Pa Patrick's house was targeted:

For my house, it was the Amba boys that burnt the house. I cannot tell a lie that it was the military. The reason why they burnt my house was that one of my sons wanted to go in for parliamentary elections. . . . The soldiers were moving around burning houses, but they never came to burn mine.

It is our understanding that for the Ambazonian fighters, to run for election during this crisis is to legitimise the state and fail to uphold solidarity with the cause. Also present here is a recurrent strategy: Pa Patrick further explained that his family was given advance warning, the son was asked not to run for election, and the fighters asked for a large sum of money in exchange for not burning down the house.

One interviewee, Roland, did speak poorly of Amba tactics preventing schools from operating:

[I]t is those boys who are in the bush preventing and doing everything possible that schools should not go. . . . To me, what I see is this: if those boys could be convinced to leave the bush, then any other activities can go ahead smoothly.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, one civilian group that stands to lose out significantly in this ongoing crisis are children who are prevented from attending schools, and so losing an education. And having discussed earlier in this chapter the credible evidence that the Cameroon state is targeting schools with violence, arson, and intimidation, it bears mentioning here that Amba fighters have credibly been accused too; it is, after all, an explicit tactic to lock down government civic institutions. Allegrozzi also raises this concern, specifically citing incidents in which Amba forces have terrorised children whom they perceive to be trying to attend school.<sup>151</sup> Worse, as others have noted, separatist fighters are alleged to have targeted not only individual homes with arson, but also schools. Of interest, from what we can tell, is that Amba incidents involving schools follow a certain rationale also. The schools have not been targeted indiscriminately; it is those perceived to be breaking the boycott.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, Amnesty International claim that 36 schools were targeted by arson attacks between February 2017 and May 2018, and cite the rationale as punishment for the perceived disobeying of the boycott.<sup>153</sup>

In the account given by Allegrozzi's interviewee, the 19-year-old student who had her finger chopped off by Amba fighters was accused by them to have schoolbooks in her possession.

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<sup>150</sup> Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa. (2019) 'Cameroon's Unfolding Catastrophe: Evidence of Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity', pp. 35-37. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Camerouns-Unfolding-Catastrophe-CHRDA-RWCHR-2019.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup> Allegrozzi, I. (2020b). 'Targeted for Going to School in Cameroon: Separatists Continue Attacks on Education with Impunity'. *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved 13/03/2020 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/12/targeted-going-school-cameroon>.

<sup>152</sup> See also Kindzeka, M. E. (2019a). 'Cameroon: Separatist Fighters Occupy 50 Schools.' Voice of America. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-separatist-fighters-occupy-50-schools>.

<sup>153</sup> Amnesty International, *ibid.* (2017a), p. 12.

According to the schoolgirl's account, the fighters wanted to chop off her right-hand finger to prevent her writing again, but after her pleading, the offenders settled for the left-hand finger.<sup>154</sup> This traumatic and shocking ordeal is hard to fathom. Despite the putative rationale for school lockdowns, it is impossible to see how a schoolchild is ever deserving of violence. What is notable – though it does not detract from the seriousness of the incident – is how the attack took place. Unlike state-sponsored violence on civilians, the attack was not, as described, indiscriminate, and although the 'sentence' was undoubtedly grim and deeply unfair, the attackers were willing to 'negotiate' the outcome to some extent. This does not justify the act in any way, but what it shows is another instance where Amba violence is qualitatively different to state-committed violence.

Finally, another strategy used by Amba forces is kidnapping. Human Rights Watch estimates that Amba fighters kidnapped and ransomed at least 350 people since October 2018, many of whom were school children.<sup>155</sup> Some reports suggest that Ambazonian fighters frequently beat, rob, and torture those they are holding in detention for having been perceived to break with strikes and lockdowns, or otherwise collaborate with the state.<sup>156</sup> Notwithstanding, again, the graveness of the violence in these allegations, there is more to remark on here. Our own interviewees tell us a now familiar narrative: those subject to kidnapping (and their relatives) are perceived to have wealth or be collaborating with the Cameroon government. Pa Patrick's son 'was kidnapped three times [by] Amba boys', the same man who had run for local elections. And, as Pa Elias explains, being unknown to the Amba fighters can mean being seen as suspect and subject to kidnapping: 'You will be picked. Picked up by the government forces or who knows. [Also] by those called "the separatists", if they don't know you, they might think you're coming in and you're a government spy.'

Roland, who was eventually forced to leave his hometown (as we discussed above), also suffered a kidnapping ordeal:

I was kidnapped and stayed in the bush for five days. . . . The person who took me from the road to the bush is my friend, . . . the person who conducted me from the bush to [a separatist camp] is somebody I employed to work in my compound. The person I met in the bush, the leader, *the leader*, is someone we bought plots of land together from the same person. I suffered in the hands of my brothers, well beaten.

The proximity of his tormentors led Roland to tell us that he identified more closely, after this, with the francophone community than his former anglophone community.

The stress, trauma, violence, and upset the practice of kidnapping causes ought not to be downplayed. Nevertheless, the Amba forces appear to be guided by a moral code. The Ambazonian Defence Forces in particular have their own Code of Conduct: 'no fighter of the

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<sup>154</sup> Allegrozzi, *ibid.* (2020b).

<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch, *ibid.* (2019a).

<sup>156</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2019b). 'Cameroon: Video Shows Separatists Torturing Man Kidnapped, Beaten, Burned in Abandoned School'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/24/cameroon-video-shows-separatists-torturing-man>.

ADF shall engage in rape, extortion, theft of property, torture, or killing of innocent civilians.<sup>157</sup> How well they are able to toe that line in practice, and how true to that Code other loosely affiliated separatist groups are in principle (or worse, alleged imitators), is of course questionable. But what proves of particular interest is that this Code seems to be oppositional in nature, for there is credible evidence that state security forces rape, extort, steal from, torture, and kill innocent civilians. Instead of adopting a simple code of aggression against civilians, it seems to us that the Amba cause is based on the logic of defence.

Notably, when the Code of Conduct is breached by members of the Amba forces, wider supporters of the Ambazonia cause readily condemn the actions, in strong and absolute terms. Take, for example, the appalling violence and murder committed against a female prison guard by a group of young men who were allegedly part of the Amba forces. In response to this crime, which is among the most horrific that has been committed in the conflict, an elderly anglophone man shared the following widely disseminated message:

[E]verywhere I have been in the world I was always proud to tell people that we Anglophones of Cameroon were different, we were more civilised and imbued with a moral quality that could stand any test anywhere in the world. It was all a lie, we are all savages from what I saw those beast do in the video. I don't know that woman but she is somebody's sister, somebody's mother or child. . . . And to say they are doing that in the name of freedom??? This is not worth it. We have become monsters. I know now that I will never trust an Anglophone again. I will never take it for granted that they had the same moral upbringing that I was given or that their sponsors genuinely seek freedom. This is over. We have lost far more than we will gain.<sup>158</sup>

The willingness of the wider anglophone people to openly condemn in the strongest terms behaviours which go against the norms of humanity and acceptability is crucial in order to prevent such crimes from reoccurring. The Cameroon state and international actors ought to condemn crimes committed by the state military in a similar way.

## 2.5. Parting Thought

This discussion and these interviews show us that there is an overriding logic to the state violence on the ground, which in one way is monetary. But it is also clear that, as discussed in Chapter 1, the way the military extorts the anglophone civilian population is consistent with a deeper and historical trend of treating them as second-class citizens, or complete outsiders.

From what ordinary civilian victims have told us, there is a demonstrable disparity in the severity, the rate, the logic, and the motivation of state versus separatist violence. Accordingly, in discussing this conflict, we urge diplomats, governments, human rights organisations, human rights activists, and other relevant actors not to fall into the trap of moral equivalence.

Without detracting from the seriousness of many Ambazonian fighter crimes, the international community has a moral obligation to acknowledge that the Cameroon state and its forces is gravely

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<sup>157</sup> As cited in Freudenthal (2018b), *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> This was reported in the log of our previous report, Willis et al., *ibid.*, p. 62 (ref. 362).

abusing its anglophone civilians, in ways that separatists are not capable of doing. The state of Cameroon is committing distinct crimes that cannot in good conscience be covered over with 'both sides' rhetoric.

## Chapter 3. The Complicity of the International Community

They allowed the Rwandan genocide to go on for so long and to take so many lives. There is a silent genocide in Southern Cameroon, and it is real. When you see the pictures of these children who were killed two or three days ago – when you see these little children – if tears cannot run down your cheeks, then you are hard-hearted. That is the truth.<sup>159</sup>

Some witnesses to this conflict, such as Pa Elias above, describe it as a silent or slow genocide, seeing the mass killings of minority anglophone Cameroonians by the majority francophone state. And as with Rwanda, the international community is failing to act; some minority anglophone populations in Cameroon fear that they will be completely destroyed. Adding weight to these fears, the state violence described up to this point includes indiscriminate mass killings of anglophone populations. Moreover, given widespread reports of discriminatory treatment of anglophone individuals, and the use of derogatory terms that belittle anglophones as sub-human (anglophones reportedly being called a range of insults, such as ‘slaves’, ‘cockroaches’, ‘rats’, and ‘dogs’), conditions are fertile for a faster form of genocide to grow. Not only is there a moral imperative for the international community to intervene in the prevention of such grave crimes, but various international actors are complicit, to varying extents.

In this chapter, we discuss the involvement of major international powers in Cameroon, both nation states and larger supra-national organisations, and examine the impact they have had on the country both generally and in regards specifically to the ongoing conflict in the anglophone regions. We begin by outlining the individual relationships which large international powers – the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, China, and Canada – have with Cameroon, noting how each has contributed to supporting subsequent Cameroonian administrations, both economically and militarily. We then describe how Cameroon has interacted with larger supra-national organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank and its subsidiary arms, such as the International Development Association and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and political organisations such as the United Nations and European Union. Finally, we consider some ancillary topics relating to the economic environment in Cameroon, such as the nature of its exports and imports, and who controls its major industries.

In the context of the historical relationships between Cameroon and many international actors, the moral responsibility of many of those same nations reveals itself to be even larger than we might at first assume. As outlined in the introduction, many nation states, including Britain, the US, France, and Germany, greatly profited from centuries of trade in enslaved persons from Cameroon – as did many private British individuals, who have continued to benefit from the proceeds of compensation paid to their ancestors over the abolition of the repugnant trade. In addition to gains made from the sale of enslaved African persons, Germany, France, and Britain further benefited from colonial extraction of Cameroon’s resources. The relationships brought to the surface in this chapter are far from exhaustive and likely mark just a tip of the iceberg. But

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<sup>159</sup> Pa Elias, mid-70s, retired professor.



from what we can see of them already, these relationships exploit Cameroon's resources in a way continuous with the past, for the primary benefit of elites.

### 3.1. Nation-State Actors

#### *The United Kingdom*

British interests in modern-day Cameroon are (at first glance) notable for their absence. Ever since the unification of anglophone and francophone Cameroon, Britain's interest in their former colony has significantly lagged behind that of France and other more powerful international actors such as China and America. Now, Britain does not even rank in the top 10 of the largest import and export markets for Cameroon,<sup>160</sup> and even though major British firms do exist in Cameroon, they appear to be significantly outnumbered by French and Chinese enterprises.

This lack of economic interests in Cameroon is matched by a lack of funding for international aid and development in the country. The British government's Department for International Development (DFID) closed its Cameroon office in 2004, and its last bilateral commitment to the country ended in the financial year of 2011/12.<sup>161</sup> We also noted in our previous report that the British Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) decided to withdraw from anglophone Cameroon in 2014, after 56 years of service in the regions, principally citing that, since Cameroon was then classed as a middle-income country, their services were better used elsewhere.<sup>162</sup>

Yet this pivot away from Cameroon may about to be reversed. With the UK in the process of transitioning out of the European Union and the uncertainties which surround Britain's future trade relations with the European bloc, many commentators have noted that the British may seek to intensify trade relationships with former British colonies.<sup>163</sup> In 2017, then UK International Trade Secretary, Liam Fox, signalled as much when he invited Commonwealth trade ministers to a meeting organised by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC).<sup>164</sup> The Council is composed of a number of corporate and financial interests, among which are oil and gas companies, and shipping organisations for Nigeria and Cameroon.<sup>165</sup> Internally, sceptics in

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<sup>160</sup> OEC. (2020). 'Cameroon (CMR) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/cmr/#Destinations>.

<sup>161</sup> DFID. (2020). 'DFID: Cameroon'. GOV.UK. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/dfid-cameroon>.

<sup>162</sup> Willis, R., McAulay, J., Ndeunyema, N., Angove, J. (2019). 'Human Rights Abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: A Submission of Evidence to UK Parliament'. Retrieved 05/04/2020 from <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/human-rights-abuses-in-the-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-recommendations-for-action/>.

<sup>163</sup> See, e.g., Smyth, J. (2018). 'UK looks to former colonies to secure post-Brexit future'. *Financial Times*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.ft.com/content/40316d56-37ae-11e8-8b98-2f31af407cc8>; and Boussebaa, M. (2019). 'Brexit's "Global Britain": UK needs a clear economic strategy for its trading future, not a dead colonial fantasy'. *The Conversation*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <http://theconversation.com/brexit-global-britain-uk-needs-a-clear-economic-strategy-for-its-trading-future-not-a-dead-colonial-fantasy-116707>.

<sup>164</sup> Global Justice Now. (2017). 'Campaigners warn against Liam Fox's post-Brexit strategy to "fleece" Africa'. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/2017/mar/8/campaigners-warn-against-liam-foxs-post-brexit-strategy-fleece-africa>.

<sup>165</sup> CWEIC. 'Strategic Partners'. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.cweic.org/strategic-partners/>.

Whitehall are alleged to have called Fox's larger plans for British investment in Africa 'Empire 2.0'.<sup>166</sup>

Mamadou Goïta, from Mali, speaking as Executive Director of the Institute for Research and the Promotion of Alternatives in Development, spoke poorly of the news:

Africa has had quite enough of having terms of trade forced on it by Britain. Oiling the wheels of Britain's economy with cheap products and cheap labour has cost our farmers, our workers and our business people dearly. . . . The Victorian delusions of the British government will not receive a positive hearing in today's Africa.<sup>167</sup>

Regardless, it seems Cameroon may be one of the former colonies with which the UK government wants to secure ties. It has made clear it seeks to make new trade arrangements with Cameroon to ensure there is minimal disruption when Britain leaves the term of the Free Trade Economic Partnership Agreement the country has with the EU.<sup>168</sup> In a bid not to lose these preferential trading arrangements, the British government is in the process of negotiating new terms with the Cameroonian government, as it is with several older trade partners.<sup>169</sup> The exact terms of these arrangements and the impact they may have on Anglo-Cameroon relationships are not yet known.

However, perhaps the most significant development in British financial interests in Cameroon began in 2018. In a press release, the Department for International Trade (DIT) announced that following a meeting with the Cameroon Minister of State, Secretary General Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, a London-based oil and gas firm, New Age, had been given the right to begin construction of an offshore floating natural gas project in Cameroon, principally to develop the Etinde gas fields.<sup>170</sup> New Age, it turns out, have their media handled by the Brunswick Group,<sup>171</sup> who are a member of the aforementioned CWEIC which organised the 2017 meeting of Commonwealth trade ministers.<sup>172</sup> The DIT claims it 'is helping UK businesses access exporting opportunities'.<sup>173</sup>

Digging into the deal further reveals that a number of other British companies are involved in this process. Stakes in the oil field originally rested with another London-based oil firm, BowLeven, and even after New Age took over the licence, BowLeven retains a 25% interest in Etinde.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Farand, C. (2017). 'UK government post-Brexit plans to create Africa free-trade zone are being internally branded "Empire 2.0"'. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-government-africa-free-trade-zone-post-brexit-empire-2-liam-fox-international-commonwealth-a7613526.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Global Justice Now, *ibid*.

<sup>168</sup> Andzongo, S. (2019a). 'UK negotiates a post-Brexit EPA with Cameroon'. *Business in Cameroon*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.businessincameroon.com/trade/0905-9107-uk-negotiates-a-post-brexit-epa-with-cameroon>.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>170</sup> DIT. (2018). 'International visits pay off for British business'. *GOV.UK*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-visits-pay-off-for-british-business>.

<sup>171</sup> New Age. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <http://www.newafricanglobalenergy.com/>

<sup>172</sup> CWEIC, *ibid*.

<sup>173</sup> DIT, *ibid*.

<sup>174</sup> Williamson, M. (2020). 'Oil and gas firm that quit Scotland welcomes breakthrough in Africa'. *The Herald Scotland*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.heraldscotland.com/business-hq/18215107.oil-gas-firm-quit-scotland-welcomes-breakthrough-africa/>.

Moreover, announced in early February, New Age have since signed a non-binding letter of intent with Victoria Oil & Gas (VOG), again London-based, to buy the output from the Etinde floating offshore rig and supply nationally to a Cameroonian subsidiary in Limbe.<sup>175</sup> The deal is considered to be worth more than \$250 million overall, and projected to last 20 years.<sup>176</sup>

What makes it all the more relevant to the ongoing conflict is the location of this proposed rig: Etinde sits in the Rio Del Ray basin, which is just off the anglophone South-West coast of Cameroon. Moreover, the subsidiary wholly owned by VOG, Gaz du Cameroun (GDC), has been accused by protesting residents in a Douala village of failing to meet its promise of giving them permanent jobs.<sup>177</sup> If true, this raises the possibility that GDC – ultimately London-based – may fail to redistribute wealth benefits to the anglophone communities in the South-West too. Also of note here is that VOG’s stockbroker, Shore Capital,<sup>178</sup> is a prominent donor to the UK Conservative Party: they donated £258,000 to its 2019 election campaign<sup>179</sup> (and have donated in the past too<sup>180</sup>). The firm describes itself as covering many oil and gas firms, including BowLeven,<sup>181</sup> who as we just noted have a substantial stake in the Etinde project.

Pro-secession (or restoration) news sources have attacked the deal as being null and void, since it does not have the consent of the Ambazonia government, and amounts, they say, to the theft of anglophone resources by Britain and the Biya administration.<sup>182</sup> Regardless of the accuracy and legality of such claims, at the very least it appears that several British firms are involved in extracting natural resources from a region that is currently undergoing a significant humanitarian and human rights crisis. In effect, then, British companies, permitted and encouraged by the British government (via at least the DIT), are taking resources from anglophone Cameroon and selling them to a francophone company.

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<sup>175</sup> Cunha, E. (2020). ‘Victoria Oil and Bowleven Note Gas Sales Agreement At Etinde, Cameroon’. *Alliance News (Morningstar)*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from [https://www.morningstar.co.uk/uk/news/AN\\_1580900777245377100/victoria-oil-and-bowleven-note-gas-sales-agreement-at-etinde-cameroon.aspx](https://www.morningstar.co.uk/uk/news/AN_1580900777245377100/victoria-oil-and-bowleven-note-gas-sales-agreement-at-etinde-cameroon.aspx); Reed, E. (2020). Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/africa/222289/etinde-partners-eye-victoria-route-to-market/>.

<sup>176</sup> Williamson, *ibid*; Cunha, *ibid*.

<sup>177</sup> Locka, C. ‘Cursed: Collateral Damage in the Unchecked Race for Resources’. *100Reporters*. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://100r.org/2018/02/cursed/>.

<sup>178</sup> Shore Capital. (2017). Retrieved 04/04/2020 from <https://www.shorecap.co.uk/posts/view/shore-capital-acts-as-joint-bookrunner-on-usd23-5m-placing-for-victoria-oil-and-gas-plc>; Victoria Oil & Gas PLC. (2020). ‘Operations Update’. *London Stock Exchange*. Retrieved 04/04/2020 from <https://www.londonstockexchange.com/exchange/news/market-news/market-news-detail/VOG/14410924.html>.

<sup>179</sup> Howard, E. & Clarke, J. S. (2019). ‘Oil, gas & gold: the investors funding the election campaigns’. *Greenpeace Unearthed*. Retrieved 04/04/2020 from <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2019/12/11/donations-election-campaign-investments-fossil-fuels/>.

<sup>180</sup> McClenaghan, M. (2011). ‘The biggest Conservative donors from beyond the Square Mile’. *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. Retrieved 04/04/2020 from <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2011-09-30/the-biggest-conservative-donors-from-beyond-the-square-mile>.

<sup>181</sup> Shore Capital, *ibid*.

<sup>182</sup> Cameroon Intelligence Report. (2018). ‘New Age Spuds appraisal well on Cameroon Etinde Block amid genocide in Southern Cameroons’. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <http://www.cameroonintelligencereport.com/new-age-spuds-appraisal-well-on-cameroons-etinde-block-amid-genocide-in-southern-cameroons/>.

These economic conditions raise the possibility that in seeking trading advantages, the British government may be blunting their criticisms of the Biya administration. And even if this is not the case, the impression is nonetheless easily fostered, given that the DIT were so glowing over the New Age deal and that the Conservative Party is a recipient of substantial donations from a stockbroker to two of the exploration and production firms involved in the project. Notwithstanding these issues, as we explored in Chapter 2, there has at least been some condemnation. (It is, however, of questionable depth).

For example, our deeper criticisms about the language of moral equivalence used by Baroness Goldie aside, on behalf of the government in the House of Lords, she has urged President Biya to commit to a peace process.<sup>183</sup> And since 2018, the UK has taken some small steps to involve themselves in the limited international response to the crisis, committing £2.5 million to the UN appeal for the anglophone crisis, with £2 million given immediately to UNICEF (Parliament 2020), thereby helping to provide food, sanitation, and healthcare to at-risk children in the conflict. These are promising actions, but they fall far short of sincere and committed attempts to provide lasting relief and to de-escalate tensions.

In 2018, then Minister for Africa, Harriet Baldwin, visited Cameroon ostensibly as an attempt to mediate. (However, given the timing of the New Age announcement, some have speculated that her purpose there was principally to promote the deal.<sup>184</sup>) Baldwin urged restraint, asking ‘all sides’ to de-escalate the conflict – exactly two years prior to the Ngarbuh massacre.<sup>185</sup> In effect, Baldwin’s statement placed the burden of ending the conflict on Cameroonians themselves. Such a line tacitly presupposes that the conflict itself is simply a product of Cameroonian or African events, with which foreign actors have no historical or present involvement. What we are finding out here, however, is that foreign parties including the UK do not have their hands clean when it comes to fuelling and enabling the conflict, or indeed conflicts in Africa more generally.

New Age is backed by US hedge fund, Sculptor Capital Management, formerly Och-Ziff, which was found by the US Securities and Exchange Commission to have bribed a slew of high-level officials in African countries.<sup>186</sup> Och-Ziff reportedly exploited corruption in ‘Libya, Chad, Niger, Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo’,<sup>187</sup> though they subsequently claim to have made substantial changes to prevent it happening again.<sup>188</sup> It remains to be seen whether they will live up to that promise, but their funding of the New Age deal to take natural resources from anglophone Cameroon at a time when the Cameroon government is credibly alleged of committing

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<sup>183</sup> HOL Hansard, *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Burton, B. (2018). ‘Controversial Deal Adds New Dimension to Anglophone Crisis’. *The Anglophone Crisis Monitoring Project*. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://anglophonecrisis.org/2018/06/09/controversial-deal-adds-new-dimension-to-anglophone-crisis/>.

<sup>185</sup> DFID. (2018). ‘Minister for Africa urges restraint and dialogue in Cameroon’. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-africa-urges-restraint-and-dialogue-in-cameroon>.

<sup>186</sup> SEC. (2016). ‘Och-Ziff Hedge Fund Settles FCPA Charges’. *SEC.gov*. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.sec.gov/news/pressrelease/2016-203.html>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Raymond, N. (2016). ‘Och-Ziff to pay \$412 million to settle U.S. foreign bribery charges’. *Reuters*. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-sec-och-ziff-capital-corruption/och-ziff-to-pay-412-million-to-settle-u-s-foreign-bribery-charges-idUKKCN11Z2NW>.

human rights atrocities on that civilian population is, at best, a move that puts profit far ahead of principle.

Investigative media group, DeSmog UK, notes that New Age is one of around a dozen oil and gas firms which are based in London, all of which are involved in the extraction of natural resources from the African continent.<sup>189</sup> A 2014 report by a group of NGOs argues that the British government are especially implicated in this wider practice, both by use of aid packages as a PR smoke screen to cover up the inequity of resource extraction, and by housing the ‘world’s largest network of tax havens that enables the theft of billions from Africa each year’:

Wealthy countries, including the UK, benefit from many of Africa’s losses. While aid to Africa amounts to less than \$30 billion per year, the continent is losing \$192 billion annually in other resource flows, mainly to the same countries providing that aid.<sup>190</sup>

Indeed, the 12 London-headquartered companies tracked by DeSmog are all, they claim, linked to tax havens (New Age itself was founded in Jersey).<sup>191</sup>

As concerning as the above is, there is some evidence that British-facilitated investment partially funds the elite Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (BIR) unit accused of committing atrocities – including the recent Ngarbuh massacre. As a state-owned company, Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures (SNH) handles all of the Cameroon government gas and oil contracts, and it is known for its opaque structure,<sup>192</sup> questions about which have not always been treated kindly.<sup>193</sup> This means effectively that New Age’s recent lucrative contract sees money going directly to SNH. The chairman of SNH is General Secretary of the Biya administration, close to Biya himself, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, who was part of the recent trade deal announcement with Liam Fox. Of notable concern here is that SNH reportedly funds the elite BIR unit.<sup>194</sup>

The most recent IMF Country Report for Cameroon lists SNH spending as part of overall government expenditures, and notes that ‘they include *emergency payments* made by the SNH on behalf of the government, substantially to cover exceptional sovereignty and *security outlays*’.<sup>195</sup> Others, such as the US State Department, have noted that the BIR unit reports directly to Biya.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Farand, C. (2018). “‘Black Gold’: Mapping London’s African Oil Hub”. *DeSmog UK*. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://www.desmog.co.uk/2018/05/09/black-gold-mapping-london-s-african-oil-hub>.

<sup>190</sup> Health Poverty Action. (2014). ‘Honest Accounts? The true story of Africa’s billion dollar losses’, p. 5.

<sup>191</sup> Farand, *ibid.* (2018).

<sup>192</sup> Gauthier, B. & Zeufack, A. (2012). Cameroon’s Oil Wealth: Transparency Matters. In Eds. Akitoby, B., & Coorey, S. *Oil Wealth in Central Africa: Policies for Inclusive Growth*, ch. 9. USA: IMF. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781616353766.071>; Locka, *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists. (2011). ‘Attacks on the Press 2010 – Cameroon’. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://cpj.org/x/4057>.

<sup>194</sup> Dougueli, G. (2013). ‘Cameroun: la politique du BIR’. *Jeune Afrique*. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/137589/politique/cameroun-la-politique-du-bir/>; Janes. (2015). ‘West African elite: Cameroon’s Rapid Intervention Battalions’. *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*.

<sup>195</sup> IMF African Dept. (2020). ‘Cameroon: Fifth Review. IMF Country Report No. 20/48’, p. 67 (emphases added). IMF. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/02/14/Cameroon-Fifth-Review-Under-the-Extended-Credit-Facility-Arrangement-and-Request-for-a-49058>.

<sup>196</sup> United States Department of State. (2020). ‘Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019’. Retrieved 28/03/2020 from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cameroon/>;



Consistent with these claims, BIR have in the past been deployed to protect SNH oil and gas industry interests in Cameroon. For example, the BIR were assigned to deal with a group in Bakassi in 2007 who saw themselves as fighting for self-determination rights by threatening oil-industry infrastructure.<sup>197</sup> In 2014, Dana Petroleum's press release about an acquisition in the Bakassi West area also noted that, among other parties, the SNH and the BIR 'have worked extremely hard to get this project to the seismic acquisition stage'.<sup>198</sup> And, in the aforementioned Douala village, civilians protesting their treatment by GDC were reportedly beaten back violently by BIR forces too.<sup>199</sup>

Taking all this into account, there is a potentially discernible connection between British oil and gas interests and those who fund the elite force, which reports only to Biya, and which has reacted with such disproportionate violence to the anglophone crisis. Moreover, the organisations in question are headquartered in London, and some make use of tax havens in British crown dependencies. Accordingly, the UK, whether it realises it or not, is in a position to affect the funding of the elite unit credibly accused of the worst atrocities.

### ***The United States***

Though the United States is currently outperformed by China in economic investments in Cameroon, subsequent administrations have invested heavily in the country. Over the last 10 years, the US has funnelled hundreds of millions of dollars into Cameroon; in particular, the Obama Administration made it a priority to fund the country, providing at least \$111 million in security and military aid in the financial year of 2015 alone.<sup>200</sup> This was then followed by an additional \$19 million in counter-terrorism training and equipment.<sup>201</sup> In addition, in the same year, 300 US military personnel, alongside high-tech equipment, such as predator drones, were deployed in the northern regions of Cameroon.<sup>202</sup>

The US has a long history with the aforementioned BIR, the elite part of the Cameroonian armed forces sometimes referred to as an 'army within an army'. Formed in 2001 to deal with terrorist concerns (though its roots are in the earlier 'Bataillon Léger d'Intervention' (BLI), formed in 1999 as a form of border security),<sup>203</sup> the battalion is better equipped and trained than the rest of the country's armed forces, and as mentioned above answers directly to President Biya rather than the

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White House. (2015). 'Letter from The President—War Powers Resolution Regarding Cameroon'. *Whitehouse.Gov*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/14/letter-from-president-war-powers-resolution-cameroon>.

<sup>197</sup> McGregor, *ibid*.

<sup>198</sup> Dana Petroleum. (2014). 'Dana Petroleum begins 2D seismic acquisition in the Bakassi West block, South West Cameroon'. Retrieved 08/03/2020 from <https://www.dana-petroleum.com/who-we-are/media-resources/press-releases/2014/dana-petroleum-begins-2d-seismic-acquisition-in-the-bakassi-west-block-south-west-cameroon/>.

<sup>199</sup> Locka, *ibid*.

<sup>200</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2017). 'Protests in Cameroon: Context and Issues for Congress'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/IN10662.html>.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>202</sup> White House, *ibid*.; United State Department of State. (2020).

<sup>203</sup> McGregor, A. (2010). 'Cameroon Rebels Threaten Security in Oil-Rich Gulf of Guinea'. *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 8 Issue 43. Retrieved 07/03/2020 from <https://jamestown.org/program/cameroon-rebels-threaten-security-in-oil-rich-gulf-of-guinea/>.

rest of the military command structure.<sup>204</sup> The US has long been involved in both arming and training this group, and a retired Israeli military officer was responsible for training the group for many years.<sup>205</sup> For much of the last two decades, the BIR was deemed the premier example of successful US partnerships in fighting the war against terror in Africa. The American Ambassador to Cameroon even praised the battalion, saying ‘[i]n their training, conduct, and leadership, the BIR exhibited all of the values we expect in our own armed forces—professionalism, protection of the civilian population, and respect for human rights.’<sup>206</sup>

This large investment in military power is likely due to Cameroon’s proximity to several regional hot spots for Islamist terrorist groups. Sharing a northern border with Nigeria, Cameroon has been a strategic partner in fighting Boko Haram for many years, in addition to supporting the fight against other Islamist organisations across the Sahel Region.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, for many years Cameroon was seen as a relatively stable and prosperous nation within a conflict-ridden region, and thus the ideal military partner.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, Cameroon is one of the biggest and most prosperous economies in Central Africa, and hosts a strategically vital system of ports.<sup>209</sup> Thus, the US has every reason to have Cameroon as a regional ally.

This makes it all the more surprising that the US is one of Cameroon’s few western allies to condemn the human rights abuses committed by the Cameroon army, in particular the BIR, in the course of the anglophone crisis.<sup>210</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, several US Congress House of Representatives members explicitly condemned the Biya administration for atrocities in December 2019, in no uncertain terms. Moreover, in February of 2019, the US had cut some military assistance to the Central African country, citing abuses as justification.<sup>211</sup> Later in the year, the Trump administration placed *de facto* economic sanctions upon Cameroon by removing them from

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<sup>204</sup> United States Department of State, *ibid.* (2020).

<sup>205</sup> Trafford, R., & Turse, N. (2017). ‘Cameroonian Troops Tortured and Killed Prisoners at Base Used for U.S. Drone Surveillance’. *The Intercept*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://theintercept.com/2017/07/20/cameroonian-troops-tortured-and-killed-prisoners-at-base-used-for-u-s-drone-surveillance/>.

<sup>206</sup> Hoza, M. (2016). ‘Gradual and Deliberate Engagement Leads to Trust and Change in Cameroon’. *Council of American Ambassadors*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.americanambassadors.org/publications/ambassadors-review/spring-2016/gradual-and-deliberate-engagement-leads-to-trust-and-change-in-cameroon>.

<sup>207</sup> Shams Wright, A. (2020). ‘Analysis: Sharp rise in Islamic State attacks in Africa’s Sahel’. *BBC Monitoring*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c201fd4p>.

<sup>208</sup> Shurkin, M. (2018). ‘Cameroon’s Days as Reliable U.S. Partner May Be Numbered’. *RAND*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/10/cameroons-days-as-reliable-us-partner-may-be-numbered.html>.

<sup>209</sup> Fahy, J. (2018). ‘The Dark Side of America’s “Train, Advise, And Assist” Missions’. *Task & Purpose*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://taskandpurpose.com/opinion/cameroon-train-advise-assist-missions>.

<sup>210</sup> AP News. (2019). ‘US cuts military aid to Cameroon over human rights concerns’. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://apnews.com/d2f384feacc74b9d8ab854de4575a5b7>.

<sup>211</sup> Searcey, D., Schmitt, E., & Gibbons-Neff, T. (2019). ‘U.S. Reduces Military Aid to Cameroon Over Human Rights Abuses’. *The New York Times*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/world/africa/cameroon-military-abuses-united-states-aid.html>.

the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which improves market access to the United States for many Sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>212</sup>

There may be some good which these actions have for potentially encouraging further international action on, or at least condemnation of, the activities of the Biya administration and its armed forces. It is uncertain how effective these trade sanctions will be, given that US economic involvement pales in comparison to Cameroon's trade relationships with China, France, and the wider European Union.<sup>213</sup> Meanwhile, the actual cuts to military aid are relatively small, amounting to the provision of a number of boats, armed vehicles and the proposed upgrade to an aircraft belonging to the BIR.<sup>214</sup> The US has thus not cut all military ties with Cameroon; even after announcing cuts with the Cameroon over allegations of its human rights abuses, key officials stressed they would continue providing military and counter-terrorism training for the Cameroon military.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, since the cuts, the US military has trained Cameroon's armed forces on advanced first aid and evacuation techniques.<sup>216</sup>

Notwithstanding the US's serious condemnation of the actions of the BIR in the anglophone region, it is somewhat late. For it is clear that such activities were not aberrant exceptions to the BIR's otherwise exemplary conduct but rather a continuation of a pattern of human rights abuses that have been ongoing for years.<sup>217</sup> And it is extremely unlikely that the US was only made aware of this pattern of conduct by the BIR when the current conflict began. The BIR has an evidenced and well-documented history of torture, arbitrary detention, and extra-judicial killings that have not only been ignored by the US government but in some respects may have been tacitly supported or tolerated by them.

Since at least 2016, Amnesty International has been reporting on the BIR's use of torture against civilians in the northern regions of Cameroon as part of the US-backed taskforce to combat Boko Haram.<sup>218</sup> In 2018, a video emerged of these forces executing helpless women and children in an extra-judicial firing squad.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, an investigation by *The Intercept* and the Goldsmiths-

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<sup>212</sup> Ekonde, D., & Adebayo, B. (2019). 'US removes Cameroon from trade pact over alleged human rights violations'. *CNN*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/01/africa/cameroon-trump-trade-pact/index.html>.

<sup>213</sup> OEC, *ibid*.

<sup>214</sup> Searcey et al., *ibid*.

<sup>215</sup> Kindzeka, M. E. (2019b). 'US ambassador says Cameroon relations good despite aid cut'. *AP NEWS*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://apnews.com/1b8ed4fbcf2b462c85e3f34087147685>.

<sup>216</sup> Kindzeka, M. E. (2019c). 'US Military Trains Cameroon Troops on Medical Evacuations'. *Voice of America*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-military-trains-cameroon-troops-medical-evacuations>.

<sup>217</sup> Freymeyer, C. (2018). 'The United States Can Stop Cameroon's Brutal Crackdown'. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/20/the-united-states-can-stop-camerouns-bloody-crackdown-biya-anglophone-africa/>.

<sup>218</sup> Amnesty International. (2016). 'Cameroon: More than 1,000 people accused of supporting Boko Haram held in horrific conditions, some tortured to death'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/cameroun-conditions-de-detention-effroyables-voire-tortures-a-mort-pour-plus-de-1-000-personnes-accusees-de-soutenir-boko-haram/>.

<sup>219</sup> Turse, N. (2018). 'Cameroon Is a Close U.S. Ally—And Its Soldiers Carried Out a Shocking Execution of Women and Children'. *The Intercept*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://theintercept.com/2018/07/26/cameroon-executions-us-ally/>; Amnesty International. (2018). 'Cameroon: Credible evidence that Army personnel responsible



based research firm Forensic Architecture found that a US-backed military base used by American military personnel and private contractors for drone maintenance and training was also being used by the BIR to illegally detain and torture civilians.<sup>220</sup> Amnesty International further reported that their own investigations revealed at least 60 victims were subjected to water torture and electrocution.<sup>221</sup> Several of the statements made by alleged victims highlighted the presence of military personnel they believed were American on the base who witnessed the torture and inhumane conditions they were held in.<sup>222</sup> Thus, it is clear that at least some members of the American military presence in Cameroon may have been aware of these conditions, but that no action was taken to stop them. Indeed, for more than a decade, the US government has repeatedly been made aware of the gross human rights abuses committed by the BIR in Cameroon. According to reporting by the Intercept, since 2010, every State Department Human Rights report on Cameroon has noted that the BIR has been credibly alleged to have committed assaults, killings, and torture against civilians' non-combatants.<sup>223</sup>

Moreover, it is plausible that the pattern of activities demonstrated by the BIR concerning the conflict in the anglophone regions are extensions of the tactics they have used against suspected supporters of Boko Haram in the north of the country. Indeed, the UN human rights report on Cameroon, The State Department of the United States of America's report, and our previous report on the anglophone crisis have all noted how the lack of transparent investigation or censure of the activities of the BIR in the northern regions by both internal and international actors may have created the conditions that have allowed such abuses to continue, and in some respects expand, during the current conflict.<sup>224</sup> To that end, the US could be said to have played a key role in creating the pervasive atmosphere within the Cameroon armed forces, mentioned also in Chapter 2 above, in which human rights abuses can be committed without fear of punishment or significant repercussions.

In theory, much of the US funding of Cameroonian military ought never to have taken place. The 1997 Leahy Laws (or amendments as they are sometimes called) are meant to legally prohibit the US State Department from providing armed assistance to foreign military units that have committed gross violations of human rights.<sup>225</sup> Given that the State Department was aware of human rights abuses for at least four years before the provision of Presidents Obama's large

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for shocking extrajudicial executions caught on video'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/cameroon-credible-evidence-that-army-personnel-responsible-for-shocking-extrajudicial-executions-caught-on-video/>.

<sup>220</sup> Forensic Architecture. (2017). 'Torture and Detention in Cameroon'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/torture-and-detention-in-cameroon>.

<sup>221</sup> Amnesty International, *ibid.* (2016).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Trafford & Turse, *ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> United Nations Human Rights Committee. (2017). 'Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Cameroon.' Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1326629>; State Department of the United States of America. (2019). 'Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://cm.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/240/2018Human-rights-report-Cameroon.pdf>; Willis et al., *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Serafino, N. M., Beittel, J. S., Blanchard, L. P., & Rosen, L. (2014). "Leahy Law" Human Rights Provisions and Security Assistance: Issue Overview'. *Congressional Research Service*, 28.

military aid package in 2015, the Cameroonian state should not have received this level of support. Yet, as Parvaz notes, while the Leahy Laws exist on paper, they are not routinely enforced in most State Department dealings. Indeed, the State Department granted billions in military aid to over a hundred countries in 2018 alone, with a number of these recipients, such as Niger, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, accused of using military equipment bought with US money on their own civilians.<sup>226</sup> Accordingly, that the State Department has continued to fund the Cameroon armed forces in spite of their alleged atrocities is no great surprise. Nonetheless, given this historical context, the limited military and economic sanctions implemented by the US against Cameroon do not seem strong enough. Continuous US administrations are complicit in the current conflict by helping to create the conditions for it.

Notably, the US's role in the crisis has extended beyond its military interests in Central Africa, and has reached its own borders. Since 2016, over 1,000 Cameroonians have reportedly fled for the US to seek asylum from the anglophone crisis.<sup>227</sup> Most are anglophone villagers fleeing political instability in their home regions, who fear return due to possible retaliatory violence from either separatist partisans or the BIR.<sup>228</sup> Many of these asylum seekers are now stranded in Mexico due to a change in Mexican asylum policies that attempts to stop refugees from using Mexico as a springboard into entering the US<sup>229</sup> – policies many believe were changed in response to President Trump's threats of punitive tariffs, and part of his administration's wider attempt to reduce asylum applicants to the country.<sup>230</sup> With many of these refugees now stranded in Mexico, plenty have reported racist and discriminatory behaviour from Mexican officials and are living in tent cities on the streets in hot and often dirty conditions.<sup>231</sup> These conditions have already proved fatal: at the end of 2019, 37-year-old Cameroonian asylum-seeker Nebane Abienwi died from a hypersensitive incident in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody.<sup>232</sup> Moreover, the journey itself is extremely dangerous, and several different international press articles are reporting stories from refugees in which they describe witnessing multiple deaths as they traverse the long path from South America to the US border.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Parvaz, D. (2019). 'The U.S. cut aid to Cameroon. Here's why that's so surprising'. *Think Progress*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/us-cuts-military-aid-cameroon-human-rights-032f7fa4a6ef/>.

<sup>227</sup> Dias, I. (2019). "'People Are Being Killed Like Flies': Denied Asylum in the U.S., Cameroonians Fear Increasing Violence Back Home'. *Pacific Standard*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://psmag.com/social-justice/people-are-being-killed-like-flies-denied-asylum-in-the-u-s-cameroonians-fear-increasing-violence-back-home>.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Lamarche, A., & Fox, A. (2019). 'The US shouldn't make Cameroonians on the border wait in vain'. *The Hill*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/457891-the-us-shouldnt-make-cameroonians-on-the-border-wait-in-vain>.

<sup>230</sup> Bonello, D. (2019, July 28). 'From Africa to Mexico: How far would you go for the American dream?'. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/african-migrants-in-america/>.

<sup>231</sup> Penney, J. (2019). 'Cameroonian Asylum-Seekers at the Border Are Fleeing a U.S.-Backed Military Force'. *The Intercept*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://theintercept.com/2019/12/01/us-asylum-seekers-cameroon/>.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Dawson, W., Creighton, C., & Mureithi, C. 'From Cameroon to US-Mexico border: "We saw corpses along the way"'. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/world-refugee-day-fleeing-cameroon-mexico-border-corpses-180616131149367.html>; Bonello, ibid.

## *France*

Though in our previous report on the present conflict we highlighted the role of the British government in shaping the current state of the anglophone regions within Cameroon,<sup>234</sup> it is equally important to consider properly the role that France has played in the development of the country. This is particularly relevant, since, we argue below, France has maintained a great deal of control and influence over the economic, cultural, and military actions of the Cameroon government from the colonial period right to modern-day. Thus, the human rights abuses and arbitrary killings currently perpetrated by the Biya administration could be viewed as related to the very similar tactics and practices that the French implemented in their violent repression of democratic anti-colonial movements, and passed to francophone proxies upon independence. To begin to understand this dynamic, it is useful to consider briefly the role of France in the early formation of the Cameroon government.

After the Second World War, France administered its majority portion of Cameroon as a United Nations Trusteeship, with the official aim of peacefully transitioning the country to full independence.<sup>235</sup> However, French colonial officials became increasingly wary of a mass democratic pro-independence and nationalist party, the Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC), which was making a case for independence, and highlighting French colonial crimes to audiences in London and New York.<sup>236</sup> To counter this, the French colonial regime began to restrict the UPC's ability to operate, intercepting their communications, banning them from participating in the first set of elections, and – during UN visiting missions to investigate and evaluate the supposed transition to independence – setting up roadblocks and cordons to keep the visiting delegates from seeing nationalist protesters.<sup>237</sup> With all avenues of legitimate political resistance gone, many within the nationalist movements turned to guerrilla warfare against the French. In response, there were large-scale counterattacks, involving mass arbitrary detentions, torture, and extra-judicial killings of civilians suspected as being collaborators.<sup>238</sup>

Despite independence from direct colonial rule, France controlled the Cameroon army and police force up to 1965, and continued a campaign of torture, mass extra-judicial killings, and even aerial bombardments against civilian populations as a means of crushing anti-French sentiment.<sup>239</sup> The systematic exclusion of the UPC from civic and political life allowed French political operators to install Ahmadou Ahidjo into power as Prime Minister in 1958, a selected, French-educated politician and future president of the country with strong ties of the French colonial regime in

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<sup>234</sup> Willis et al., *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Deltombe, T. (2016). 'The Forgotten Cameroon War'. *The Jacobin*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://jacobinmag.com/2016/12/cameroon-france-colonialism-war-resistance>.

<sup>236</sup> Lock, E. (2016). 'Ruben Um Nyobè (1913-1958)'. *Black Past*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/ruben-um-nyobe-1913-1958/>.

<sup>237</sup> Terretta, M. (2017). 'The unfinished business between Cameroon and France'. *Africa Is a Country*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://africasacountry.com/2017/03/the-unfinished-business-between-cameroon-and-france>.

<sup>238</sup> Weigert, S. L. (1996). 'Cameroon: The UPC Insurrection, 1956–70'. In S. L. Weigert (Ed.), *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*. pp. 36–48. (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>239</sup> France 24. (2019b). 'Survivors tell of France's "dirty war" in Cameroon independence'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.france24.com/en/20191228-survivors-tell-of-france-s-dirty-war-in-cameroon-independence>

Cameroon. Indeed, it was Article 20 of the French-authored constitution that allowed the national assembly to grant Ahidjo full presidential powers without an election.<sup>240</sup>

Ahidjo's new administration would continue the fight against the UPC with French backing, with many of the party's leaders living in exile across Africa, where a number were assassinated by French-backed military operatives.<sup>241</sup> Throughout the '60s and '70s, reference to the UPC was made illegal, both France and the new administration took steps to ensure the war was never publicly discussed on the international stage.<sup>242</sup> Estimates as to how many people were killed in this war range from 60,000 to 120,000, and the ongoing silence in the international community shows the success of subsequent French administrations in downplaying their hand in shaping the post-independence structure of the Cameroonian state.<sup>243</sup> It wasn't until 2015 that any French president publicly admitted France's role in the war,<sup>244</sup> but no accurate or complete account of the French attempt to destroy the UPC or the thousands killed in the conflict has ever been provided by the French government.

Furthermore, even though Cameroon is a sovereign power, France retains a great deal of influence over the Biya administration. France, for example, remains a major military partner with Cameroon, supplying them with resources and training military personnel.<sup>245</sup> This is a tactic they have employed across their former colonies in West and Central Africa.<sup>246</sup> While this military support is, at least publicly, presented as a partnership to combat militant Islamist groups, it is still conditional. In a NATO summit in London last December, President Macron demanded that partners in West Africa dismiss and tackle anti-French sentiment in their countries if they wanted to continue to receive military aid for stabilising the Sahel region of Africa.<sup>247</sup> While not directly referenced in this conference, Cameroon is a major partner for French military operations and thus presumably faces the same pressures from the French government over its involvement.

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<sup>240</sup> Terretta, *ibid.* (2017).

<sup>241</sup> Brittain, V. (2006). 'They had to die: Assassination against liberation'. *Race & Class*, 48(1), pp. 60–74.

<sup>242</sup> Terretta, M. (2013). *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence: Nationalism, Grassfields Tradition, and State Building in Cameroon*, pp. 141-142. (Ohio: Ohio University Press). See also Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. (California: University of California Press).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> RFI. (2015). 'Au Cameroun, François Hollande brise un tabou'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20150703-cameroun-francois-hollande-paul-biya-guerre-upc-lydienne-yen-eyoum>.

<sup>245</sup> Terretta, M. & Chétima, M. (2018). 'The US and France back's Cameroons reign of Terror. Africa is a Country'. *Africa is a Country*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://africasacountry.com/2018/08/the-us-and-french-backed-reign-of-terror-in-cameroon>.

<sup>246</sup> Sundberg, A. (2019). 'France—A Continuing Military Presence in Francophone Africa' in *Foreign military bases and installations in Africa*, pp. 22-26. Swedish Defence Research Agency – FOE. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI-R--4658--SE>.

<sup>247</sup> France 24. (2019a). 'Macron tells G5 leaders to address "anti-French sentiment" for continued military cooperation in Sahel'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.france24.com/en/20191204-macron-tells-g5-leaders-to-address-anti-french-sentiment-for-continued-military-cooperation-in-sahel>. For more on France's complicated role in the region, see Orock, R. (2019). 'Rumours in War: Boko Haram and the politics of suspicion in French-Cameroon relations'. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 57,4, pp. 563-587.

Indeed, unlike the US, France has not made efforts to address human rights concerns by cutting military support for the BIR and the rest of the Biya administration's armed forces.<sup>248</sup>

Potentially more significant than its military involvement is the French economic relationship with Cameroon. France remains Cameroon's second largest trading partner after China,<sup>249</sup> and French businesses are the main beneficiaries of the EU's newly opened trade relations with Cameroon.<sup>250</sup> The French government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes that French exports to the country totalled €476m in 2017, while in 2018 imports from Cameroon came to €476m.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, they note a significant economic presence among French businesses: 100 subsidiaries and 200 businesses belong to French nationals operating in Cameroon at the time of writing.<sup>252</sup> Indeed, if we look at one of Cameroon's most profitable exports, crude oil, we can see a large deal of French involvement in the sector. Despite Cameroon having its aforementioned national oil company, SNH, the largest and most profitable business in the sector is Perenco, a private company jointly owned by French and English actors.<sup>253</sup>

However, more than simply having a large stake in the private sector of Cameroon, France indirectly controls aspects of the country's very currency. Cameroon, alongside almost all of the former French colonies, has their currency directly tied to France. As a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States, Cameroon uses the Central African Franc (CFA).<sup>254</sup> Not only is the CFA directly pegged to the Euro, but it is guaranteed by the French treasury, and about half of the foreign earnings of all CFA states' earnings are lodged directly with the French Treasury.<sup>255</sup> In this way, France maintains a great degree of control over the economies of Cameroon and the rest of their former colonies, with a French representative currently allowed to sit on the currency's monetary policy committee with voting rights. Due to being pegged to the Euro, the European Central Bank is also effectively in control of monetary and exchange rate policies for Cameroon.<sup>256</sup> These terms have been criticised as a form of economic imperialism by academics and economists, and some have argued that the current system both prevents African

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<sup>248</sup> Irish, J. (2019). 'France says to continue military cooperation with Cameroon'. *Reuters*. Retrieved from 04/03/2020 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-cameroon-idUSKCN1PW1RA>.

<sup>249</sup> OEC, *ibid*.

<sup>250</sup> Ernest, S. (2016). 'French companies are the main beneficiaries of the economic partnership between Cameroon and the EU'. *Cameroon Intelligence Report*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.cameroonintelligencereport.com/french-companies-are-the-main-beneficiaries-from-the-economic-partnership-between-cameroon-and-the-eu/>.

<sup>251</sup> Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires (2020). 'Cameroon'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/cameroon/>.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>253</sup> Daly, J. (2012). 'Cameroon, West Africa's Latest Oil Battleground'. *Oil Price*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Cameroon-West-Africas-Latest-Oil-Battleground.html>.

<sup>254</sup> Devex. (2020). 'Banque des États de l'Afrique Centrale (BEAC)'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.devex.com/organizations/banque-des-etats-de-l-afrique-centrale-beac-52137>.

<sup>255</sup> Diagne, C. A. B. (2019). 'How Francophone Africa's France-backed CFA franc works and why it's controversial'. *Quartz Africa*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://qz.com/africa/1680534/how-francophone-africas-cfa-works-why-its-controversial/>.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*.



nations from effectively determining their own economic needs and allows western powers to set *de facto* economic policies for countries who have radically different fiscal priorities than the west.<sup>257</sup>

From the above, it is clear that France continues to exert a huge deal of influence over Cameroon, both militarily and economically. Indeed, France's role in creating the modern Cameroon state, and its unacknowledged role in creating a military apparatus which perpetrated mass human rights abuses during the transition to independence, may have established the prime condition for the centralised, unaccountable, and militarised administration we see today. In line with this way of thinking, other commentators have already drawn parallels between how French colonial administrators dealt with the UPC in the 1950s and how the Biya administration attacked peaceful anglophone protesters using violence and repression.<sup>258</sup>

It is worth noting that President Macron and the French government have repeatedly condemned alleged human rights abuses and called for the Cameroon government to de-escalate the violence.<sup>259</sup> More recently, when confronted by a Cameroonian activist, President Macron alleged that he had put pressure on President Biya to release the then imprisoned opposition leader, Maurice Kamto.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, President Macron has said he will continue to put pressure on Biya to investigate the recent Ngarbuh massacre discussed in the above chapter.<sup>261</sup>

These steps are encouraging, but we are yet to see what force such diplomatic interventions will have. Meanwhile, there is evidence that the French approach is diverging from the path that Washington may be taking on resolving the crisis. In an article in *The African Report*, journalist Mathieu Olivier quotes an anonymous diplomat who alleges that France and America are clashing over how to deal with the conflict, with the Americans wanting a sanction-based policy while the French want to back Biya's regime and resolve the crisis internally.<sup>262</sup> While this is one report from an undisclosed journalistic source and thus must be taken with caution and scepticism, it could indicate that French influence may be a hindrance to the international community taking a stronger approach with the Cameroon government. In the next and final chapter, a key recommendation will be for multilateral sanctions; it will be especially important that France is onboard were these to manifest.

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<sup>257</sup> Sylla, N. S. (2017). 'The CFA Franc: French Monetary Imperialism in Africa'. *Blogs – London School of Economics*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/07/12/the-cfa-franc-french-monetary-imperialism-in-africa/>.

<sup>258</sup> Terretta, *ibid.* (2017).

<sup>259</sup> Foute, F. (2020). 'Emmanuel Macron remarks spark public outcry in Cameroon'. *The Africa Report*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.theafricareport.com/23912/emmanuel-macron-remarks-spark-public-outcry-in-cameroon/>.

<sup>260</sup> Journal du Cameroun. (2020e). 'Cameroon: French President Macron reveals pressure on Biya'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-french-president-macron-reveals-pressure-on-biya-that-released-kamto-from-jail/>.

<sup>261</sup> Trompiz, G., & Vidalon, D. (2020). 'France's Macron says "intolerable" rights violations taking place in Cameroon'. *Reuters*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-france-cameroon-macron-idUKKCN20G0N4>.

<sup>262</sup> Olivier, M. (2020). 'Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: No dialogue between close enemies'. *The Africa Report*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.theafricareport.com/23819/camerouns-anglophone-crisis-no-dialogue-between-close-enemies/>.

Considering the above, we deem it vital that any attempt to address the anglophone conflict be met with an honest and transparent discussion of how French colonialism helped create the modern conditions of Cameroon, and how these ties continue to exist to this day.

### ***Germany***

As the original colonial administrators of Cameroon prior to the country's being divided between the British and French, Germany shares a historical connection to the country and maintains some ties to it to this day. Germany provides the single largest sum of bilateral government development cooperation funding in the world to Cameroon, at an amount of €100 million between 2017-2019.<sup>263</sup> In terms of the ongoing conflict itself, Germany has played a limited role so far, despite a number of members of the German parliament calling for Chancellor Angela Merkel to intervene in the conflict and put pressure upon President Biya.<sup>264</sup>

Germany's role in Cameroon came under scrutiny last year when it was discovered that the country had been conducting a four-year military operation in Cameroon, without the knowledge of much of the public and the Bundestag (the lower chamber of parliament) itself.<sup>265</sup> While typically German military missions require parliamentary approval, a legal loophole that allows missions involving no direct combat to be made without the typical mandate appears to have secured the mission's secrecy.<sup>266</sup> The purpose of the military operation was to train the Cameroon army in anti-terrorism techniques, commonly understood to be aiding them in their fight against Boko Haram in the North of the country, as noted above. However, complicating matters, Germany remained in Cameroon for two years after the start of the anglophone crisis.<sup>267</sup>

In effect, then, German forces have indirectly supported the Cameroon army while it is credibly accused of committing human rights violations in the anglophone regions. Though these secretive operations have now ended, the affair signals that Germany has contributed to the wider pattern of military support for the Biya administration, prioritising them as regional partners in anti-terrorism operations over holding them accountable for human rights violations. This is concerning, since Germany, as a strong economic and political power in Europe and an influential member of the European Union, is otherwise well positioned to take a strong lead in pressuring Biya's government to end the conflict.

### ***China***

China's role in Cameroon differs from France and Britain, for example. Despite lacking historical and colonial ties, China has increasingly become involved in the nation (as it has with much of

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<sup>263</sup> German Federal Foreign Office. (2020). 'Germany and Cameroon: Bilateral Relations'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/kamerun-node/cameroon/209372>.

<sup>264</sup> Oneko, S. (2019). 'German lawmaker urges Merkel to pay more attention to Cameroon crisis'. *DW*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.dw.com/en/german-lawmaker-urges-merkel-to-pay-more-attention-to-cameroon-crisis/a-49071233>.

<sup>265</sup> Krippahl, C. (2019). 'End of a "secret" German military mission in Cameroon'. *DW*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.dw.com/en/end-of-a-secret-german-military-mission-in-cameroon/a-49610889>.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

Africa) in an attempt to secure economic benefits and gain allies. By this means, it can continue to cement itself as an ascendant economic and military hegemonic power. Much academic literature has been written on the role that China plays in the development of post-colonial African nations, with particular attention paid to the common pattern of China using large-scale economic investment in national partners in Africa as a strategy both to extract valuable natural resources and to secure markets where they can export low-cost, mass-produced consumer goods.<sup>268</sup> Some commentators have criticised this model for prioritising short-term economic developments that largely benefit Chinese investors, while hampering the ability of host nations to develop sustainable economic policies that do not rely on larger foreign powers.<sup>269</sup>

The situation is no different when we examine the specific context of Sino-Cameroon relations over the past several decades. China remains Cameroon's largest import and export partner in the world, and is the country's single largest creditor. According to the IMF, Cameroon's total debt is 5.8 trillion CFA, the equivalent of \$10 billion, around a third of which is owed directly to China.<sup>270</sup> In addition to these considerable loans, China has also been generous in giving debt relief to the Central African Country. It has granted nearly \$100 million in debt relief since the turn of the century,<sup>271</sup> and just last year cancelled \$78 million of interest-free inter-government debt owed by Cameroon.<sup>272</sup>

In addition to being a creditor, much of China's influence in funding Cameroon has been, as it has across Africa, mainly concentrated in infrastructure projects. China has become the largest provider of road construction in the country, and has been involved in large-scale projects, such as the financing construction of a new port in the fishing town of Kribi, which most experts agree will be the biggest deep-water port in the region.<sup>273</sup> China has further agreed to aid in constructing roads and railways to connect the port to other ports and commercial centres both in Cameroon and across Africa.<sup>274</sup>

Many critics both inside and outside Cameroon see Chinese construction as concentrating money in the hands of Chinese contractors at the expense of local workers, and that the short-term contracts prioritise quick economic gains over longer-term economic investments to build up

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<sup>268</sup> See Alden, C., Large, D., & Oliveira, R. S. de. (2009). *China returns to Africa: A rising power and a continent embrace*. (New York: Columbia University Press); Jansson, J. (2009). 'Patterns of Chinese Investment, Aid and Trade in Central Africa' (Cameroon, the DRC and Gabon). *Centre for Chinese Studies*, 59. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from [http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/ccs\\_central\\_africa\\_briefing\\_paper\\_august\\_2009\\_2.pdf](http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/ccs_central_africa_briefing_paper_august_2009_2.pdf).

<sup>269</sup> Askouri, A. (2007). 'China's Investment in Sudan: Displacing Villages and Destroying Communities?'. In Manji, F. and Marks, S. (Eds). *African Perspectives on China in Africa*, pp. 71–86. (Oxford: Fahamu).

<sup>270</sup> Marsh, J. (2019). 'China just wrote off a chunk of Cameroon's debt. So why the secrecy?'. *CNN*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/04/china/cameroon-china-debt-relief-intl/index.html>.

<sup>271</sup> Cabestan, J.-P. (2015). 'China–Cameroon relations: Fortunes and limits of an old political complicity'. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 1–24.

<sup>272</sup> Marsh, *ibid*.

<sup>273</sup> Musa, T. (2011). 'Cameroon takes China loan for Kribi port project'. *Reuters*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJJOE70B0JZ20110112>.

<sup>274</sup> Marsh, *ibid*.



industry within the country itself.<sup>275</sup> This has been further exacerbated by the increase in both migrant Chinese labour and cheap imported goods from China, both of which have been said to undercut local workers and products at the expense of local Cameroonians.<sup>276</sup> Further, a recent controversy involves Chinese mining operations. International reports have noted that such operations (including but not limited to Chinese ones) have used gold-mining practices which have polluted local villages, caused landslides, and created sink-holes, killing many villagers across Cameroon.<sup>277</sup> These incidents are particularly egregious due to regulations in place by the Cameroon government which require mining companies by law to ensure any area they mine is left in safe conditions; international reporting indicates that these regulations are largely being ignored by Chinese mining companies.<sup>278</sup>

In addition to the economic investment China has within Cameroon, it has also played its part to arm Biya's administration. As of July of 2018, China provided the equivalent of \$8 million to the Cameroonian government to purchase military equipment,<sup>279</sup> stating that 'the objective of the agreement is to promoting peace and security in Cameroon'.<sup>280</sup>

Summarising the role of China in Cameroon, it is notable that despite early optimism by other African leaders and thinkers that cooperation with the Chinese would allow bilateral, mutually beneficial relationships devoid of the colonial legacy that attaches to Western cooperation, China has in some respects reproduced these dynamics.<sup>281</sup> Chinese involvement in Cameroon is not win-win; it involves the extraction of valuable resources while simultaneously damaging local economic actors, and propping up an increasingly authoritarian government with no sign of condemnation in the future. Indeed, China's relative silence on the anglophone conflict has been particularly striking, and it is indicative of a wider pattern of upholding trade and military relationships with authoritarian African governments who routinely violate human rights, in the interests of

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<sup>275</sup> Mazhimhaka, P. (2013). 'China and Africa: An African View'. In Chan, S. ed. *The Morality of China in Africa: The Middle Kingdom and the Dark Continent*, (pp. 89–121). New York: Zed Books; Amin, J. A. (2015). 'Sino-Cameroon Relations: A Foreign Policy of Pragmatism'. *African Studies Review*, 58(3), 171–189.

<sup>276</sup> Chintom, N. K. (2011). 'CAMEROON-CHINA: A Wedding with Uncertain Prospects'. *Inter Press Service*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/01/cameroon-china-a-wedding-with-uncertain-prospects/>.

<sup>277</sup> Lazareva, I. (2020). "'Gold pits have become tombs": Mining leaves a tragic legacy in Cameroon'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/14/gold-pits-have-become-tombs-mining-leaves-a-tragic-legacy-in-cameroon>.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> See defenceWeb. (2018). 'China, Cameroon Sign Military Assistance Agreement'. Retrieved 12/03/2020 from [http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=52447:china-cameroon-signs-military-assistance-agreement&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111](http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52447:china-cameroon-signs-military-assistance-agreement&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&Itemid=111); TRT World. (2018). 'China Donates Nearly \$8 Million to Cameroon's Security Forces'. Retrieved 12/03/2020 from <https://www.trtworld.com/mea/china-donates-nearly-8-million-to-cameroon-s-security-forces-19016>; and Beseka, M. (2019). 'The Dragon in the River of Shrimp: The Reality and Perception of Chinese Investment in Cameroon'. *The Yale Review of International Studies*. Retrieved 12/03/2020 from <http://yris.yira.org/comments/3012>.

<sup>280</sup> defenceWeb, ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Amin, ibid.

economic gain. In this context, it is also worth noting that China (alongside France) opposed a potential Resolution by the UN Security Council, during an arria-formula meeting in May 2019.<sup>282</sup>

### **Canada**

During this research, we discovered that Canada has a surprisingly significant relationship with Cameroon. Canadian diplomatic relationships with Cameroon extend back to 1962, and the North American nation is represented in Cameroon through the High Commission of Canada in Yaoundé, while also having an honorary consulate in Douala.<sup>283</sup>

There are some affinities between Cameroon and Canada. On the surface, both are former colonial states, but this description masks a significant difference: Canada formed as a European settler state in which indigenous peoples native to the land were killed and displaced, whereas Cameroon (or the Cameroons) was an imperial interest run or kept as a dependency of different empires. In consequence, how the two countries formed over time, and their economic, political, and international relations, differ significantly. Nonetheless, given at least that surface similarity, both nations are members of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the British Commonwealth<sup>284</sup> and both have strong ties to France and Britain.

Canada and Cameroon also have trade and financial relationships. In 2018, trade between the countries amounted to more than \$69.1 million (Canadian Dollars).<sup>285</sup> In addition, in 2017-2018 Canada provided international assistance to Cameroon which totalled more than \$28 million.<sup>286</sup> Perhaps the most significant development in relations between the nations came in 2017, when the Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC), a Canadian state-owned business enterprise, signed a \$126 million government contract with the Sports Ministry of Cameroon to revitalise an ailing major football stadium in the country, set to host the African Cup of Nations in 2019 prior to Cameroon being stripped of it.<sup>287</sup> This contract is no small deal: before the contract was signed, the CCC's total revenue in Africa amounted to little more than \$5.1 million. However, in 2018/19, after the deal was finalised, the total revenue for Africa sat at \$73.3 million.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, as of August of last year, the CCC was also in talks to take on a contract for the repair of road infrastructure in the City of Douala.<sup>289</sup> Roberts notes that these investments likely come from a

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<sup>282</sup> UN Web TV. (2019). Retrieved 12/04/2020 from <http://webtv.un.org/search/arria-formula-meeting-of-the-un-security-council/6036271424001/>.

<sup>283</sup> High Commission of Canada in Cameroon. (2020). 'Canada-Cameroon Relations'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from [https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/cameroon-cameroun/bilateral\\_relations\\_bilaterales/canada\\_cameroon-cameroun.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/cameroon-cameroun/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_cameroon-cameroun.aspx?lang=eng).

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Canadian Commercial Corporation. (2018). 'Growing Canadian Export Business 2017-2018 Report'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.ccc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/annual-report-2017-2018-1.pdf#page=6>.

<sup>288</sup> Roberts, C. (2019). 'The crisis in Cameroon exposes lingering problems in Canadian foreign policy'. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-crisis-in-cameroon-exposes-lingering-problems-in-canadian-foreign/>.

<sup>289</sup> Andzongo, S. (2019b). 'Cameroon: CCC in pole position to replace Wietc/Crcc14 for the renovation of East entrance of Douala'. *Business in Cameroon*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from

commitment by the Canadian government to diversify their international investment portfolio.<sup>290</sup> However, he argues, in doing so Canada has chosen profits and investment growth over defending human rights by propping up the Biya administration, which Roberts characterises as kleptocratic and authoritarian.<sup>291</sup>

It is difficult to disagree with Roberts's assessment, given that the Canada government has done little if anything to hamper or hold the Cameroon government accountable for their actions beyond vague condemnations. Essentially, despite historical, diplomatic, economic, and developmental ties which could make Canada an ideal negotiating partner to introduce real international dialogue aimed at holding the Biya regime to account and ending the conflict, little if any action has been taken that would facilitate such an option. Instead, economic interests appear to be placed at the forefront of international concern, including Canada's.

### 3.2. Other International Agencies

#### *The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank*

While China remains Cameroon's largest single lender and creditor, financial institutions controlled by the Global North have long been involved in supporting the Biya administration, largely in the name of development. These investments have proven necessary given the many financial issues the Cameroonian government has suffered since the 1980s.<sup>292</sup> As an example, let us begin by examining the country's relationship with the International Monetary Fund. Since Cameroon gained membership in the IMF, they have had eight standby agreements and extended credit facility agreements with the organisation, borrowing the equivalent of millions of dollars.<sup>293</sup> Most recently, in 2017, due in part to a series of financial shocks caused by a drop in oil prices, the IMF agreed upon a three-year emergency loan to Cameroon that was worth the equivalent of \$666 million United States dollars.<sup>294</sup>

In addition to its relationship with the IMF, Cameroon also has extensive experience of working with the World Bank and its subsidiary arms, the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). As of 2019, the World Bank reported that through 15 IDA, IBRD, and trust fund operations, it had a net commitment of \$1.81 Billion committed to Cameroon.<sup>295</sup> This significant investment into the country is, in

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<https://www.businessincameroon.com/economy/2608-9433-cameroon-ccc-in-pole-position-to-replace-wietc/crcc14-for-the-renovation-of-east-entrance-of-douala>.

<sup>290</sup> Roberts, *ibid*.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>293</sup> IMF. (2018a). 'History of Lending Arrangements: Cameroon'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/fin/tad/extarr2.aspx?memberKey1=120&date1key=2018-08-31>.

<sup>294</sup> IMF. (2017). 'IMF Executive Board Approves US\$666.2 Million Arrangement Under the Extended Credit Facility for Cameroon'. Retrieved from 04/03/2020 <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/06/26/pr17248-imf-executive-board-approves-arrangement-under-the-extended-credit-facility-for-cameroon>.

<sup>295</sup> World Bank. (2019a). 'The World Bank In Cameroon'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview>.

theory, meant to align with the New Country Partnership Framework with Cameroon, which is meant to cover Cameroon from 2017 through 2021.<sup>296</sup> This agreement is primarily in place to assist in meeting several objectives which include eliminating poverty traps, strengthening infrastructure and private sector development, and improving governance.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, the International Finance Corporation, a sister organisation to the World Bank that focuses on private sector development, has 14 private investments in Cameroon for a total outstanding portfolio of \$404 million, while the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, a World Bank group partner that provides political risk insurance and credit enhancement to investors and lenders, currently supports three projects in the country with a gross exposure of \$265 million.<sup>298</sup>

From all of this, it is clear that many major international financial institutions heavily invest in and loan to Cameroon. This heavy level of investment, combined with the disruption of the economy caused by the conflicts across regions of the country and the consequently increased security spending, are beginning to have an impact on Cameroon's economy, and in particular its debt. The IMF, not one year after granting a \$666 million loan to the country, rated Cameroon as at a high risk of entering debt distress in 2018.<sup>299</sup> These activities have been the subject of acute criticism as part of a wider critique of the IMF's lending policies. For example, activist group Jubilee Debt has argued that the IMF has recklessly lent millions of dollars to high-risk countries without requiring strict debt restructuring programmes to be in place, the consequence of which is to reward bad faith recipients and increase the risk of these countries entering bankruptcy.<sup>300</sup> The ultimate consequences of the financial fallout of the IMF and the nations leaders' financial failures rest with the ordinary citizens of these countries. It should be noted that Cameroon was included as one of the countries that the Jubilee group believed the IMF had recklessly lent to.<sup>301</sup>

While it is beyond both the scope of this research to perform an accurate financial analysis of the Cameroonian economy and the ability of the Biya administration to manage its debt, Roberts has noted that despite Biya's repeated failures as President, his administration has always found a way to retain power, bail the economy out, and avoid accountability. Part of that has been the administration's ability to secure funding from agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank in times of financial distress.<sup>302</sup> If that line of thought is cogent, then it could be argued that the international financial system acts to prop up the Biya regime, and through continually lending to

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<sup>296</sup> World Bank. (2017). 'World Bank Launches New Strategy for More Evenly Distributed Prosperity in Cameroon'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/publication/world-bank-launches-new-strategy-for-more-evenly-distributed-prosperity-in-cameroon>.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> IMF. (2018b). 'Cameroon: Staff Report for the 2018 Article IV Consultation'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dsa/pdf/2018/dsacr18235.pdf>.

<sup>300</sup> Elliot, L. (2019). 'IMF accused of "reckless lending" to debt-troubled states'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/oct/07/imf-accused-of-reckless-lending-to-debt-troubled-states>.

<sup>301</sup> Jubilee Debt Campaign UK. (2017). 'Cameroon Debt Statistics 2017'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://jubileedebt.org.uk/countries/cameroon>.

<sup>302</sup> Roberts, *ibid*.

his government, prevents accountability for the economic or political issues that his regime has made and continues to make.

### *International political organisations*

For much of the present conflict, larger international political organisations had failed to take speedy action either to hold Biya's government to account or to push for a rigorous peace process, but this has begun to change.

In 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, visited Cameroon to offer advice to the government in ending the conflict.<sup>303</sup> Moreover, in the same year, the European Parliament called on the UN security council to discuss the crisis,<sup>304</sup> and indeed later that year an informal meeting of the council considered the matter.<sup>305</sup> The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, also issued a public statement in 2019 on behalf of the rest of the EU condemning the violence and calling for the Biya administration to end the conflict.<sup>306</sup> The UN has also been involved in coordinating humanitarian efforts in anglophone regions of Cameroon, with the Commissioner for Refugees appealing for \$184 million to fund projects aimed at assisting those displaced by the crisis in March of 2019.<sup>307</sup> And in November of 2019, a senior figure from each of the African Union, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, and the Commonwealth visited Cameroon to meet with stakeholders, including Biya.<sup>308</sup> The tripartite visit sought to support peacebuilding, unity, and the dialogue effort.

More recently, four senior UN officials, including representatives of wings dealing with violence against children and the prevention of genocide issued a joint statement condemning the deaths of more than 20 civilians in the Ngarbuh massacre, discussed in the prior chapter, which is widely believed to have been committed by Biya-controlled forces.<sup>309</sup> The General Secretary of the UN,

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<sup>303</sup> OHCHR. (2019). 'Bachelet welcomes Cameroon's willingness to cooperate to tackle human rights crises'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24565&LangID=E>.

<sup>304</sup> European Parliament. (2019). 'Joint Motion for a Resolution on Cameroon'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2019-0245\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2019-0245_EN.html).

<sup>305</sup> Oneko, *ibid*.

<sup>306</sup> Council of the European Union. (2019). 'Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, on behalf of the EU, on the deteriorating political and security situation in Cameroon'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/03/05/statement-by-the-high-representative-federica-mogherini-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-deteriorating-political-and-security-situation-in-cameroon/>.

<sup>307</sup> UNHCR. (2019). 'Cameroon Situation: Responding to the Needs of IDPs and Cameroonian Refugees in Nigeria—Supplementary Appeal January – December 2019'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Cameroon%202019%20Supplementary%20Appeal%20%28March%202019%29.pdf>.

<sup>308</sup> The Commonwealth. (2019). 'Joint declaration of the tripartite visit to Cameroon'. Retrieved 12/04/2020 from <https://thecommonwealth.org/media/news/joint-declaration-tripartite-visit-cameroon>.

<sup>309</sup> United Nation News. (2020b). 'Cameroon: UN officials raise alarm over escalating violence, call for civilian protection'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057881>.

Antonio Guterres, also made a statement through a spokesperson calling on the Cameroon government to investigate and ensure responsibility for the crimes were meted out.<sup>310</sup>

Reviewing these contributions, it is difficult to determine accurately to what extent larger supra-national organisations have influenced the Biya administration. Though an investigation into the most recent killings has been announced,<sup>311</sup> similar investigations have occurred in the past and have limited impact in preventing future abuses,<sup>312</sup> and it goes without saying that the anglophone crisis remains ongoing despite these condemnations.

### 3.3. Cameroon External Trade Relations

Though this report has referred to Cameroon's trade relationships many times, it is worth consolidating these and laying out a comprehensive view of Cameroon's trade relationships in one section. Cameroon's main export commodities are fuel (predominantly oil and gas), minerals (mostly coal and aluminium), wood, cocoa, cotton, and rice.<sup>313</sup> In contrast, Cameroon's imports are predominantly food, medicines, and manufactured products (such as vehicles, machinery, and electrical and electronic equipment).<sup>314</sup> Cameroon's three largest export sites are China, France, and Italy, while its largest import suppliers are China, France, and Thailand.<sup>315</sup>

In 2016, Cameroon signed and ratified an interim Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU. This agreement allows all goods from Cameroon to enter the EU duty- and quota-free, and gradually removes duties and quotas over 15 years, on 80% of EU exports to Cameroon.<sup>316</sup> This decision was deeply controversial within Central Africa, since other neighbouring countries in CEMAC were unhappy with the EU's terms and had warned Cameroon against signing the deal without the support of the wider bloc – a warning Biya's government went on to ignore.<sup>317</sup> The controversy largely seems to rest on the concern that dismantling tariffs on EU imports will potentially undermine the local industry, reduce custom revenue, and prevent the diversification

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<sup>310</sup> United Nation News (2020a). 'Guterres "deeply concerned" over deadly assault in north-west Cameroon'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057571>.

<sup>311</sup> Anadolu Agency. (2020). 'Cameroon president orders investigation into killings'. Retrieved 06/03/2020 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/cameroon-president-orders-investigation-into-killings/1749210>.

<sup>312</sup> State Department of the United States of America, *ibid.* (2019).

<sup>313</sup> Trading Economics (2019). 'Cameroon Exports 2001-2019 Data'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://tradingeconomics.com/cameroon/exports>.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*; OEC, *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> WITS. (2018). 'Cameroon Exports, Imports and trade balance By Country 2017'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CMR/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>; OEC, *ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> European Commission. (2020). 'Factsheet on the Economic Partnership Agreement – UE-CENTRAL AFRICA (CAMEROON)'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from [https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/june/tradoc\\_155624.pdf](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2017/june/tradoc_155624.pdf).

<sup>317</sup> Sixtus, M. (2016). 'Cameroon goes it alone with controversial EU trade deal, angers regional partners'. *African Arguments*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://africanarguments.org/2016/09/26/cameroon-goes-it-alone-with-controversial-eu-trade-deal-angers-regional-partners/>.



of Central African economies away from relying on exporting natural resources.<sup>318</sup> These concerns appear to have been largely dismissed by the Biya administration.

As prefigured above, oil remains one of the largest and most profitable of Cameroon's exports. Despite Cameroon having a nationalised oil company in the SNH, the market is currently dominated by Anglo-French and Chinese interests.<sup>319</sup> Anglo-French interests are represented by Perenco Cameroon, a French/English private oil company that became the largest oil operator in Cameroon after it took over responsibility for the former operations of Total E&P in 2011.<sup>320</sup> Chinese interests are represented by the Addax Petroleum Cameroon Company, which was created when the Chinese state-owned China Petrochemical Company (also known as Sinopec Group) purchased an 80% stake in the formerly Pecten Cameroon Corporation from Royal Dutch Shell. Currently, the other 20% stake in Addax is in the hands of the SNH.<sup>321</sup> This means that while the Cameroon government has a large stake in the country's oil sector, the vast majority of control of the sector lies in the hands of foreign corporations. Moreover, the SNH only sells access to oil production, rather than engaging in it directly itself, and so unlike, say, Malaysia, is poorly positioned to become more autonomous in that sector.<sup>322</sup>

### 3.4. Parting Thought

Far from the Cameroon conflict being a dispute between two internal parties, an assortment of international actors is heavily involved. Support includes the funding of the Cameroon military and its most elite unit, the BIR, which are engaging in serious abuses of power and acts of violence against anglophone populations. Moreover, various international parties have lucrative trade deals and offer forms of financial support through financing and credit options. International involvement is so dense, it is hard to see clear separation which could insulate these actors from some complicity in the harms being committed by the Cameroon state against its anglophone population.

International actors who seek to enter into trade deals in Cameroon ought to reflect on the local communities whose resources are being taken. In the shadow of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which inflicted the most brutal form of exploitation onto people in Southern Cameroon, international actors must give serious consideration to local consent and to fair compensation. Only then might the structural harms of the past, as well as those continuing in the present, finally begin to be addressed.

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<sup>318</sup> Kindzeka, M. E. (2016). 'New EU Trade Deal Stirs Controversy in Cameroon'. *Voice of America*. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://www.voanews.com/africa/new-eu-trade-deal-stirs-controversy-cameroon>.

<sup>319</sup> Mbendi. (2018). 'Cameroon: Oil And Gas Industry'. Retrieved 04/03/2020 from <https://mbendi.co.za/cycaoi.htm>.

<sup>320</sup> Reuters (2012). 'Cameroon crude output on track for 100,000 bpd in 2012'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.reuters.com/article/cameroon-crude-idAFL6E8EI0CN20120318>.

<sup>321</sup> Euro Petrole. (2014). 'Addax Petroleum completes acquisition of an 80% shareholding interest in Pecten Cameroon Company LCC (PCC)'. Retrieved 05/03/2020 from <https://www.euro-petrole.com/addax-petroleum-completes-acquisition-of-an-80-shareholding-interest-in-pecten-cameroon-company-lcc-pcc-n-i-10507>.

<sup>322</sup> Gauthier & Zeufack, *ibid*.

## Conclusion: Routes to Peace

Our research participants universally wished for peace, whether that is sought through independence, federalism, or some other negotiation. 'Peace is what everybody needs,' says Milan. 'Because without peace, what can we do? We cannot rest a breath without peace'. 'All that can come out of this conflict after the war is peace, it's just peace,' says Anthony. 'If the likes of you people can come and help and release us, then there will be peace, and peace will reign all over the world.'

In Chapter 1, we discovered how our interviewees often referred to feeling like slaves or being ruled over; a feeling of having never been free from an oppressor. We also met with reminders that in various ways the historical record bears out the point. First, the people in the anglophone regions were hit so strongly by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and also by an extractive and exploitative colonialism. Independence proved to be a matter of an unstable federalism, backed by the international community but not largely by the anglophones themselves (as our interviewees frequently spoke about), and eventual inclusion in a 'republic' which marginalises and spends considerably less wealth on them. Finally, in this latter stage, anglophones have had their resources extracted by the francophone Cameroon government and external foreign actors, without themselves receiving meaningful benefits of trade deals.

In the context of that lack of control, it is important to see that requests for the international community to intervene are calls to act against oppression of the anglophones. Indeed, pleas from our interviewees normally came attached to a concern for their autonomous destiny: a seat at the table, a genuine voice in a real dialogue, a democratic wish, a need to be heard. Consider Pa Elias:

The main issue is just for the government to recognise the anglophone people . . . as a people that the African Union had recognised, that the United Nations had recognised, and voted for their independence. The government should respect them as such, so that we agree and sit at the table so that if we are going to stay together, we now formalise agreements before the international community. So that we can have a file at the United Nations [stating] that this is what we have agreed on to stay together. That if this [agreement] is violated at any other time, there will be peaceful separation. . . . Otherwise, let us separate and agree to be good neighbours.

Blasius envisions as part of a peaceful solution that Cameroon's natural talent is allowed to grow at home too, instead of becoming an export: 'All the children who are going abroad, will stay here and work and we will then have progress for the nation, not progress for individuals but for the nation.'

Others remind of the international community's responsibility for the tensions. Ozias points to the British historical involvement:

Why is Britain silent when they caused all this? Why is Britain silent? And the United Nations, what about their Charter? What about the United Nations Charter? Why did they vote for the independence of a people by joining [La République du Cameroun], when it is against the United Nations Charter? Why did the British do that, instead of giving independence to Southern Cameroon, to decide on their own whether to unite with the French Cameroonian republic or with Nigeria?



In Michel's view, 'the worst part of it is that France is an enabler. France is behind it. I cannot mince words. Because anywhere we want to go, France is intervening.' He feels, moreover, that his people's voices are not being heard by anyone now: 'we have talked a lot, and the UN is not responding. How shall – *to whom shall* – we talk now?'

In their calls for the international community to intervene, our interviewees also recognised that this is where power lies. Several of our research participants pointed to power being in the hands of Cameroonian elites and international actors, in stark contrast to the dearth of power among anglophone populations. For example, Dominic thinks that international actors who have power are already complicit by their inaction:

To solve this crisis, all I know is that this world [the international community] has power. But have they allowed these people to kill us all? They have the power to watch over us. Why have they allowed for us to be [killed]? What is happening to mean that they cannot come with this power, despite the fact that many of us have been killed?

While those we spoke with want some action from international actors and agencies, that does not mean that they are asking to surrender power. For the most part, our interview participants are asking for the international community to notice that they do not have power, that they never truly did, and that they yearn for some meaningful power in the form of resolution and control over their futures.

In our last report, we noted the limitations of the national dialogue.<sup>323</sup> Doubt has been cast on the Cameroon government's commitment to dialogue and oppositional leaders were deeply cynical of any good intentions behind it. In the course of the present paper, we found our interviewees to be especially scornful of civic engagement by the Cameroon government, fostered by the perception of rigged elections, and widespread corruption and extortion schemes (pre-conflict and beyond). They also spoke to us of their cynicism regarding the national dialogue in Yaoundé at the end of last year. Nonetheless, our interviewees still had some appetite for dialogue, but only on the caveat that it is free, fair, meaningful, and neutral.<sup>324</sup>

Asked what would in his view help resolve the conflict, Ozias says 'dialogue'. But it transpires he thinks the Biya administration has never seriously sought a dialogue involving 'Swiss mediation', hence why the government 'set up their own "national dialogue" here, which was a shambles'. Likewise, Wendy desires a neutral arbitrator in the process: 'The presence of a third party will surely inspire both parties to find a peaceful solution.' And Milan stresses the need for neutral ground: 'Because if they say they are going to come to sit in Cameroon, it is not a neutral ground.'

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<sup>323</sup> Willis, R., McAulay, J., Ndeunyema, N., Angove, J. (2019). 'Human Rights Abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: A Submission of Evidence to UK Parliament'. Retrieved 05/04/2020 from <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/human-rights-abuses-in-the-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-recommendations-for-action/>, para. 108.

<sup>324</sup> Commentators have also emphasised that current efforts have not been up to scratch. For example, see Hendricks, C. & Ngah Kiven, G. (2019). 'Why Cameroon must move beyond dialogue to solve its Anglophone crisis'. *The Conversation*. Retrieved 01/04/2020 from <https://theconversation.com/why-cameroon-must-move-beyond-dialogue-to-solve-its-anglophone-crisis-125241>.

Ultimately, Wilfried thinks, as do others, that any stumbling blocks are down to the government:

I think our government has refused to solve the problem. The only way out is for the government to dialogue. They are struggling to say that they are dialoguing but I think that is a monologue not dialogue. That is the whole show. If our government wants the problem to be solved, it will be solved. That is all I know.

The desired outcome of the dialogue was somewhat mixed. Three of our research participants were in favour of federalism, yet the large majority (over two-thirds) wanted independence for the anglophone regions. For plenty of our interviewees, the course of the conflict and the pain it has endured has entrenched their view on the matter. Consider Dominic: 'I just want us to be on our own because what they've done to us is too much. They should let us go.' Pa Elias has had his heart swayed on the matter by the way the conflict unfolded:

For a long time, I campaigned and stood with others, saying that [we should have a two-state federation], so that if we want to make any other changes, we do them together and not the government imposing. That was my position until 2016, and since 2016 I have changed, that we should be two countries apart.

This is perhaps a sign that the longer the conflict goes on, and the more extreme the atrocities committed, the greater the demand for anglophone independence will grow.

## **Ideas for action**

Mindful of suggestions made by our interviewees, we recommend international actors with ties to Cameroon to address the anglophone conflict. As Chapter 3 outlined, several major nation-states, private corporations, and international agencies are implicated in the current conflict. As Chapter 1 outlined, continuing exploitation of the anglophone regions is not forgotten in civilian life, nor could it be: structures of slavery, discrimination, and inequity find themselves replicated through subsequent ages. Moreover, we pointed out that in almost every facet of this conflict, it is those who have the least who are harmed the most – by loss of education, loss of life, loss of future, loss of history, and loss of wellbeing. Chapter 2 showed that the true extent of this violence is not only unevenly felt; it is unevenly applied. That is, the Cameroon state has overwhelmingly been the aggressor, with greater capacity and resources, and with indiscriminate use of violence. Thus, timid statements by governments and media outlets which commit a moral equivalence between 'both sides' deny a reality on the ground for those most affected. That is a reality which the international community has both a duty to represent, and a duty to respond to.

In the first instance, the international community has to recognise the extent to which individually and jointly they are compromised by this conflict: from the enslavement, the colonial history, the handling of the plebiscites, the federation, and the dissolving of it, through to the military aid, training the BIR, facilitating trade deals with exploitative oil companies (and allowing them to use offshore tax havens), high-risk lending practices, and generally giving legitimacy on the world stage to a regime which is committing atrocious human rights abuses. Because of present and historical involvement with Cameroon, the international community owns a part of this conflict: it must also own a part of the solution.

Given the widespread complicity of the international community in this crisis, it is not feasible that an attempt from one state will force Biya's administration into a genuine dialogue scenario. This means that if the international community truly wants to end this disastrous conflict, there must be trade sanctions and aid cuts imposed at a multilateral level: only then will the Cameroon government be likely to enter into meaningful dialogue with affected stakeholders on neutral grounds.

Likewise, the international community needs to be united in its condemnation of the Biya regime. Accordingly, they cannot give legitimacy to the Cameroonian state by hiding behind a moral equivalence, suggesting in any way that the different parties to this conflict are equally positioned, equally capable, or equally committing mass atrocities: they plainly are not.

Moreover, we think foreign governments can do much more by way of positive action too. This might mean the forming of trade deals which ensure representation of local communities and the rights of workers in general; sincere commitments to permanent jobs and upskilling; or making sure that local communities do not bear the brunt of negative externalities. It also means using all available tools to pressure the private companies who are most exploiting the regions. If governments and international agencies do not begin to take more equitable approaches of this stripe, the question will resurface: are future trading structures with Africa really just going to form 'Empire 2.0', as sceptical Whitehall figures had termed Liam Fox's plans in 2017?

Lastly, we contend that it is not for the international community itself to be ruling out options from a dialogue or solution. Owing to the history of oppression and to the yearning of many of our interviewees for collective control over their destiny, we think it is especially important that actors in the Global North do not, e.g., make statements suggesting that Southern Cameroon has no right to independence. The harms of slavery and colonialism, as discussed in Chapter 1, are still being lived: interviewees describe feeling like 'slaves', lacking control of their lives, being othered, and being denied full citizenship. That is the plight of the Southern Cameroonians, or the Ambazonians. Accordingly, it is not for Europeans or North Americans to be dictating now whether they ought to exercise a right to self-determination.

## **Recommendations**

The investigation and findings presented over the last four chapters lead us to the following recommendations for action:

1. For commentators to afford greater attention to the crimes committed by the Cameroon government and for a spotlight to be shone on international partners who have contributed to the accumulation of state power that has made these crimes possible.
2. For commentators and state representatives to avoid adopting a language of moral equivalence, which lends legitimacy to the Biya administration by failing to condemn in absolute terms the atrocities of state security forces. While violent crimes have been committed by multiple parties, differences of power must be heeded.

3. For nation states and other international parties to act multilaterally and place concerted pressure on the Cameroon government to end the violence, whether through trade sanctions, aid cuts, or other means.
4. For the international community to facilitate true dialogue, convened by an independent arbitrator, and to monitor the implementation of settlements reached. Representatives from disadvantaged communities should be invited to participate.
5. For representatives of nation states and other international agencies to avoid proclaiming whether a given option (e.g., secession) is non-negotiable – local stakeholders must have control of the available negotiating positions.