

Understanding Conflicts in Cameroon History through 'Awilo's' Song 'Contri Don Spoil'

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Abstract

According to Geoff Crowther, Cameroon is Africa's most socially artificial country. Although this description seems an exaggeration of reality, Cameroon history after reunification in 1961 displays linguistic cleavages of the English and French cultures. This is a fall-out of German colonialism and the partition of Cameroon into French and British Cameroons after the First World War of 1914 to 1916. During the era of British and French colonial administration, the Mungo River was an important restrictive barrier to the free movement of goods, services and people across the Anglo-French spheres of the Cameroons. The 'officialising' of socio-political differences by successive ruling elite of the two linguistic groups for self-interest has been captured by Ndi Tansa aka 'Awilo' in his sound track titled 'contri don spoil.' The failure of the ruling elite to 'officialise' or promote nationhood in Cameroon is due to among other things a result of inherent cleavages among English speaking Cameroonians. It is also due to a failed romance between the two linguistic groups at the official level. This essay explores the socio-political tensions in a country united in disunity as captured in the music of 'Awilo's hit song 'contri don spoil.'

1. Introduction: Historical Roots of the Problem

The song 'contri don spoil' by Awilo reflects the problems of Cameroon whose roots are in the British and French colonial administration. The history of Cameroon from 1916 is a 'tale of two countries'; namely English and French speaking Cameroons. This has been elaborately documented by several authors among whom are (Ardener et al 1960; Ardener 1967:285-337; Johnson 1970; Rubin 1971; Joseph 1978; Kofele-Kale 1980; Fanso

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1985:23-43; Mbuagbaw et al 1987; Chiabi 1989:170-199; Njeuma 1989; Ebune 1992; Ngoh 1996 and 2001; Milne 1999; Mbile 2000; Awasom 2003/2004:86-116). After independence, this dichotomy remained until recently. There is a spirited attempt to promote the learning of English language by French speaking Cameroonians to promote national unity. The bilingual and bi-cultural nature of Cameroon is a result of the partition of German Kamerun into two unequal halves after the First World War (one-fifth to Britain and four-fifth to France). After the war, Britain and France partitioned German Kamerun. The 1914-16 War in Cameroon that led to the defeat of the Germans by combined French, British and Belgian forces. The eventual partition of Cameroon did not help in the consolidation of the nation state that the Germans had tried to put in place between 1884 and 1916. This laid the foundation for the challenges or problems of Cameroon after independence.

From the period 1914 to 1916 Britain and France attempted a joint administration or condominium but it collapsed even before take-off. This was a result of disagreements over leadership in authority and territorial control (Fanso 1989; Elango 1987). In 1922, the League of Nations through the Mandates Agreement sanctioned British and French control of the Cameroons with commitments to improve on the status of the territory. Both countries were called upon to present annual reports to the Mandates Commission on the level of development in their respective spheres of influence. This partition and recognition by the League of Nations is the genesis of what I describe as a 'tale of two countries.' Through this act the two Cameroons, that is, British and French Cameroons, evolved through different administrative systems (a decentralised and centralised administration respectively). Throughout the period of British and French administration, some nationalists from both sides of the divide like Um Nyobe, Roland Felix Moumie, Ndeh Ntumazah and Albert Mukong² fought for the reunification of the Cameroons.

The Gaullist tradition of centralisation and the British policy of indirect administration impacted on the perception of state affairs after the reunification of the Cameroons on 1 October 1961.

² Reuben Um Nyobe and Roland Felix Moumie were frontline members of the militant Unions des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) which was formed in 1948 with the main objective of immediate independence and reunification of British and French Cameroons. Um Nyobe was the founding Secretary General of the party and was killed in 1958. On the other hand, Ndeh Ntumazah and Albert Mukong were the founding leaders of the One Kamerun (OK) political party after the banning of the UPC in British Southern Cameroons in 1957.

The Prime Minister John Ngu Foncha³ of British Southern Cameroons and Ahmadou Ahidjo⁴, firstly as Premier of French Cameroun and then as President of the Cameroun Republic before reunification in 1961 were in many instances diametrically opposed to each other. While Foncha generally thought of a Cameroon which would be a decentralised territory, Ahidjo shrewdly laid a foundation for a highly centralised polity during the Fouban constitutional conference of 17-21 July 1961.

The shrewdness of President Ahmadou Ahidjo resulted in the establishment of a federal system of government in Cameroon between 1961 and 1972 when a referendum was organised on 20 May and Cameroon became a unitary state. Ahidjo had exploited the bickering between leaders of the country especially those of West Cameroon (Kah 2003:103-125) to stamp his authority as the uncontested leader or father of the nation (Pere de la nation). The political intrigues of Ahidjo and the scheming of his very close cohorts cost Cameroon the unity which is annually trumpeted on 20 May in the form of 'grandstandocracy.' The annual celebration has not healed the wounds of division and bitterness among political activists of English speaking Cameroon like Ngala Nfor Nfor and Ayamba Otu⁵. They are unfortunately a divided minority made possible by the divisive tendencies of the Francophone and Anglophone ruling elite (Kah 2012:71-103).

Following the resignation of Ahmadou Ahidjo as President of Cameroon on 4 November 1982, Prime Minister Paul Biya, his constitutional successor, assumed the mantle of leadership of this bilingual and diverse country.

³ He rose to the post of Prime Minister of British Southern Cameroons after the general elections of January 1958. Prior to this, he was leader of the opposition Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) after breaking away from the ruling party the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) led by Dr E.M.L. Endeley in 1955. After the reunification of the Southern Cameroons with the Cameroun Republic in 1961, Foncha became the Vice President, was dropped in 1970 and then subsequently appointed as the Grand Chancellor of National Orders. He resigned his post in the 1990s arguing that the government forces had brutalised Anglophones during the post-1992 elections violence.

⁴ Appointed as the Grand Chancellor of National Orders. He resigned his post in the 1990s arguing that the government forces had brutalised Anglophones during the post-1992 elections violence. This was a prominent politician from the vast Muslim region of Cameroon. He joined politics and was elected into the local parliament. He became the Minister of the Interior and Vice Prime Minister to Andre Marie Mbida and took over from him in 1958. He led French Cameroon to independence in January 1960 and then became the first president of a reunited country. He ruled the country until 1982 when he resigned and handed power to his constitutional successor Prime Minister Paul Biya.

⁵ These are the leaders of the Southern Cameroons National Council advocating the separation of English-speaking from French-speaking Cameroon. The latter was a traditional ruler in Manyu Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. He died recently.

Although Ahidjo handed over the reins of leadership to Paul Biya, the two soon fell out leading to the coup d'état of 6 April 1984 between loyalist and rebel forces (Cameroon Fragile State 2010: 10-11; Fanso 1989; Konde 2012: 25-37). The failure of the coup led to mass executions of enemies of the state and the entrenchment of Biya as another "father" of the Cameroonian nation. The treatment of some people from the northern part of Cameroon especially Muslims and the close associates of the former president laid the basis of the perceived North/South dichotomy in Cameroon politics today. Paul Biya has ruled Cameroon since 1982. Attempts from the 1990s to unseat the incumbent Paul Biya after the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon have so far failed due to ethnicity, patronage, election rigging, and fractured opposition among the other forces in the country (Nkwi 2006 and Nyamnjoh 2005).

Since independence of the Cameroun Republic in 1960 and the reunification with British Southern Cameroons in 1961, two major groups have ruled the country. Power was first in the hands of the northern Muslims represented by President Ahmadou Ahidjo. Following the resignation of Ahidjo on 4 November 1982, power shifted from the Muslims of the North to the Beti-Ewondo-Bulu ethnic groups represented by Paul Biya on 6 November 1982. Since then, there have been tensions between the northerners and southerners over leadership of the country. In the midst of this power tussle between the Northerners and Southerners, the *business*-minded Bamileke people have also tried to create alliances and capture state power but to no avail. Rather, over the years they have been lumped up with the Anglophones and treated in the coastal towns of Cameroon as strangers.

The Anglophone minority on the other hand, which consists of many ethnic groups has occupied ceremonial posts of Vice President, Speaker of the National Assembly and recently the post of the Prime Minister and Head of Government. These positions do not carry weight in a presidential system of governance like that of Cameroon. The economically vibrant Bamileke of the West Region of Cameroon have only recently been given senior positions in the power equation of Cameroon. The president of the newly created Senate is Niat Marcel Njifenji and the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) Jean Keute are all Bamileke. The ruling party has therefore played with the idea of rewarding different ethnic groups through representation in government but has also excluded others which explain their opposition to government.

The dominance of the CPDM through the use of civil servants, state resources and elections which are not transparent has weakened many political parties to the extent that the only ones represented in the legislature are limited to among others the Social Democratic Front (SDF), Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU), National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP). These parties and others put together have an insignificant representation in the legislature. For this reason, the one party mentality of hand clapping and support for the government remains without any critical evaluation of its actions and policies. Bills pass through parliament with little or no resistance from the so called people's representatives.

The history of a politically divided Cameroon since independence has been pointed out in this introduction to establish the link that this has with 'contri don spoil' of 'Awilo.' If Cameroon has multiple problems today such as the ones highlighted by Awilo, the genesis of these problems is from the history of the country since the colonial period when it was divided into two unequal halves.

2. Methodology, Significance and Relevant Literature

In this study, use has been made of field observations of daily discussions by Cameroonians on the socio-economic and political problems of the country. Use has also been made of newspaper articles, articles and books and a content analysis of 'Awilo's' song titled contri don spoil. In the song he has raised several issues which are better appreciated within the context of the history of Cameroon spanning from its colonial to the post-independence eras. This explains why historical sources have been used to trace the origins and manifestations of the problems or conflicts 'Awilo' present about the Cameroonian society. Some of these conflicts have been compounded by the very fact that Cameroon is a bi-cultural country epitomised by the Mungo River which was an international boundary between British and French Cameroons between 1916 and 1961.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that music is life and permeates all segments of existence in African and other communities. The different genres of music create a sense of belonging, solidarity, unity; differentiation and nostalgia in the way things ought to be (Onyeji 2004:152) because they are often not. Music also covers other issues and acts as social commentary and criticism.

It also addresses development related matters and advocates improvement and good leadership in society (Finnegan 1970:273; Longwe and Clarke 1990:3).

Some authors contend that singing is formal cultural expression or reveals the cultural fabric of African society (Ifionu 1989:151; Akpan 2003:129; Lewis 2004:28). It has been described as a form of expressive art and through it, the rich and diverse cultural heritage of different African societies has been brought to the limelight. Singing in Africa is an art that combines vocal and instrumental sounds into an emotionally pleasant unit. It also serves as a medium where life is expressed in all its diversity (Tala 1987 /1988:102). Nketia (Saleh 1985:25-26) adds that singing and life are inseparable. Through the agency of music the Africans attitude to life, their hope and fears, thoughts and beliefs are made known to the larger society. Such is the kind of music that 'Awilo' has produced in Cameroon which discusses the hopes and fears of Cameroonians in a difficult socio-political milieu.

Music is also connected to social identities (Feld 2000:145; Palmsberg and Kirkegaard 2002:15) and is the most subtle and refined way of human entertainment for both the young and old, the aristocrat and the commoner (Onyeji 2004:151). In reference to African songs and or music, Tala (1987/1988:102) opines that it is a form of pleasure and satisfaction for the aesthetic needs of people. Songs serve this purpose and also create new forms of knowledge, meanings, thinking and documentation. Songs perform in fact markedly utilitarian function to different societies at different times in their history (Brusila 1990:35; Tala 1987/1988:102; Bender 1991:xii-xvi; Onyeji 2004:152).

This utilitarianism explains why music or songs mean life, creates life in the African traditional milieu and also lightens the spirits of those in bondage. They permeate the political, economic and socio-cultural milieu of all African societies. The degree of importance varies from one environment to another. The lyrics serve as an important source of historical reconstruction spanning through the politico-economic and socio-cultural domains. In the music of 'Awilo' is information. To fully appreciate this information, the history of Cameroon before and after independence is necessary.

Politically, music is used for community spirit in Africa and it also symbolises solidarity and unity (Tala 1987/1988:102). Finnegan (1970:272-273) contends that music serves the purpose of reporting or commenting on current affairs.

The musical compositions are also used for political pressure and propaganda to reflect and mould public opinion. Finnegan's observation is an apt description of what this paper suggests namely that the music of 'Awilo' serves the purpose of exerting pressure on the leadership of Cameroon to embark on reforms such as the recruitment of 25, 000 young people into the civil service recently, the challenges involved notwithstanding. Still, others use music to indirectly or informally communicate burning issues to leaders and the suppressed masses. The aim is usually to influence policy while avoiding the consequence of speaking to them openly (Finnegan 1970:275) although some musicians dare do so.

Singing in Africa is also used to invoke the 'gods' in traditional religion (Onyeji 2004:149). The outcome of this is often the establishment of a form of social cohesion. Music is therefore an indispensable vehicle for honouring, sustaining and edifying traditional institutions and the customs of a people (Ifionu 1989:151-152). When this happens, those in authority are happy with the political stability and security of the society they lead. Many scramble to identify with both the supreme spirits of the land and the traditional structures that handle such religious matters. Traditional religion and music have therefore become a very strong uniting force in different African societies but have also divided people.

Still, in the political realm music has been used to assert nationhood (Ifionu 1989:164). Throughout the colonial era, political songs were composed and sung throughout the length and breadth of Africa to create or marshal a sense of belonging and heritage. This was against the backdrop of European colonial administration. It was the target of attack by African nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Amilcal Cabral of the Gold Coast, Guinea and Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau respectively. During the civil war in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970, music was used as an important tool to arouse nationhood among the people of Eastern Nigeria when they rose against the Federal Republic of Nigeria for a new state of Biafra. In the present dispensation, singers compose songs to address contemporary issues like instability and the search for unity, as Boni has rightly observed (Boni 2000:176).

Music has and continuously serves an economic interest. Among the Kpelle of Liberia for instance, the best soloist gains prestige but more importantly becomes financially independent.

This soloist moves from place to place performing for pay from those who invite him or her (Hunt and Stein 1993:43). It is also becoming fashionable in both rural and urban economic life in Africa to use songs for commercial purposes. Marketing or advertising strategies are facilitated through the use of songs or music. This also includes the marketing of the music itself. Onyeji further elaborates that singing produces company during work or manual labour (Onyeji 2004:151-152). This helps to mobilise people to work harder and increase the output of goods and services. It should, however, be noted that it has also promoted laziness among those who take part in it.

In the socio-cultural domain, singing is an important accompaniment to the initiation of young boys and girls into adulthood. In the past Sande girls were kept in seclusion and given intensive training in music and dance. This was when they were being prepared for adulthood. Similarly, among the Kpelle, the girls were taught responsorial songs which were also lessons for adulthood. Besides, in Tokoe society of Ghana, the young girls perform in music and dance during the coming-of-age ceremony. This performance takes place in front of the entire village (Hunt and Stein 1993:42-43). The important function of singing within the Sande, Kpelle and Tokoe has been replicated in other African cultures. Within the socio-cultural milieu, music is used to satirise witches and wizards for their malicious activities of killing people (Chia 1997:12). This study attempts an analysis of the music of 'Awilo' contri don spoil within the context of the socio-political history of a bi-cultural Cameroon.

3. Conflicts in Cameroon: A Contemporary Analysis

Cameroon is Africa in miniature considering the diversity in its vegetation type and, language groups. There are as many as over 280 languages and dialects which has made the country to be conveniently described as a 'babble of tongues' (Fanso 1989; Shultz 1993). Rather than serve as a source of strength, the diversity in cultures and languages has been a source of permanent tension and conflict. There are as many cleavages in the country as there are ethnic and language groups, increasing cosmopolitanism and a growing population of detribalised youths in the towns and cities of the country. The rich are extremely rich. This has made some people describe them as 'stupidly and boisterously' rich. The poor, on the other hand, are exceedingly poor. These are the extremes that have continued to widen the gap between the different social classes in Cameroon.

The result is a mouse and cat-like relationship between the very rich and the extremely poor. The poor have used various approaches to vent their anger and disenchantment with the Cameroonian ruling elite and its acolytes. During the period of electoral consultation these 'wretched of the earth' refuse to register and vote. In spite of many commissions set up to encourage them to vote, they have often resisted them. Others have opted to sell illegally imported fuel in spite of the crackdown on this economic activity.

Another socio-political cleavage in the country is the promotion of ethnicity with provocative impunity by the leadership of this country at different levels of the administrative ladder. Some ethnic groups like the Beti/Ewondo have reserved juicy positions, especially those linked to the control of finances. The Hausa/Fulani since the days of President Ahmadou Ahidjo virtually colonised the military and recruited their kith and kin with impunity. Other ethnic groups have used their elite to colonise other areas of national life like education and some parastatals. During the days of Prime Ministers Ephraim Inoni and Peter Mafany Musonge (between 1996 and 2009) many Bakweri sons and daughters were placed in strategic positions in education. These included people made principals of colleges in Fako Division to the exclusion of other competent Cameroonians.

Besides, in Cameroon there is a political conflict between the ruling elite from the different regions of the country (Nkwi 2006). Each of them wants to be seen and heard and are really to pull the strings for their personal favour and that of very close family members. This conflict blossoms during the run-off to municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections in the country. The elite trade accusations and counter-accusations against one another to the extent that even within the same party they are simply strange bed-fellows. This conflict manifests itself in the form of cultural and development associations, regional non-governmental organisations and other such groups as Chantal and Biya Youths, that is Jarchaby, Presby and President Biya's Young Patriots (Presbyyapa) (Kah Forthcoming). These are simply cover-ups for various attempts to hide the wrongs of those who have plundered state resources with reckless impunity and diverted peoples' attention to regional tensions which serve only the interest of the perpetrators. Such are the kinds of conflicts that 'Awilo' in his hit musical album have addressed in very strong terms. An extract from his song in pidgin English states emphatically:

Papa and mama wona no fool we. Wosai the future for this contri dey?. If something no ti do dis contri, then this contri ti do something. This contri don spoil. Who spoilam and who could fix sam?

These are serious issues and rhetorical questions are raised by 'Awilo' which lay bare the history of Cameroon's socio-political cleavages. The papa and mama he refers to here are people in leadership positions in the state machinery who are an example of bad leaders. Considering the high level of unemployment and armed burglary like the one in Amity Bank in Limbe on 28 September 2008 and Ecobank Douala on 18 - 19 March 2011, 'Awilo' is worried about the future of Cameroon. Considering the problems of Cameroon, 'Awilo' sarcastically argues that something is either wrong with Cameroon or the country itself is on the wrong path. The centre is collapsing but those in authority do not seem to see any problem with the country which makes 'Awilo' to ask the sixty-four million dollar question of who could solve its myriad of problems?

4. Historical Connection of Awilo's Obsession with Cameroon

'Awilo' is the pet name of Mr Ndi Tansa. He hails from the Donga Mantung Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. This region was very critical of the state during the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1990. This was because of the debilitating economic crisis and the neglect of the construction of the ring road among other social grievances. Many of its citizens dumped the single ruling party, the Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM) for the newly formed party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF)⁶. He is a budding musician with several albums to his credit among which are "We don tiya Beti," and "contri don spoil." He is an anti-establishment musician who believes that it is a matter of time before things begin to fall apart and the centre no longer holds (Vakunta Awilo's Head-on Collision with the Beti Mafia in Cameroon; Cameroons National Communication Council bites <http://erasmodelavega>). Apart from producing music critical of the state and its activities, he is also a TV presenter with the LTM TV in Douala. The famous programme he presents that is watched by many commoners is "Town Cryer." This programme presents issues that affect society and is greatly appreciated by many people.

⁶ The SDF was founded in 1990 in the North West Regional capital Bamenda. The Chariman of the party is Ni John Fru Ndi. It is the leading opposition party in the country.

It was due to this that in 2013 he was suspended by the National Communication Council from presenting this programme for six months and also from broadcasting. The lyrics of his song, "Contri Don Spoil", present the dilemma of Cameroon. These lyrics read thus:

.... IPP Man he head na he neck carry am. Creation rapide eh bien payee. Eh mama eh contri don spoil eh. Eh mama eh contri don spoil eh Who spoil am, who could fix am... Yes mona camerounais dem. Ondong Ndong say he no fit die l'acheté for sika détournement des fonds publics. Mais où sont les autres. C'est les choses à vérifier.

This contri get fever. Mbere dem they don turn na clando driver for Mboko here. Repe be talk say place where nang hold you cablé daso for don dibi. PMUC he don make reke dem get vertige because say dem miss one number chaque dimanche... for sika million invisible.... Qui est riche à cause de tiercé? Wona langwa me.

Eh mama eh contri don spoil eh. Eh mama he contri don spoil.... South West he don ton na extreme South West. Kumba-Mamfe road he don ton na the culture of the Manyu people. Every day motion of support from Mamfe to Yaounde for sika weti? The job badly done? I hear say Mamfe woman, Kumba woman dem no ti buy powder again because of dust. Their colour don change for sika dust but everyday motion of support. Ambition don chop wona for witch? Les choses à vérifier.

New law for Cameroon he don chop mona policier dem alias faire bien la voiture. Tu me donnes mes cinq cent comme réglé. Now na civil he dey for minioté nye dem. Wonna don see weti? Petit Pays be commut say même les chefs d'état meurent but time where cocoma call eh for ngola, he want come back Brenda, Junior, Anastasie. Les chefs d'états ne peuvent mourir.

Money get power. Money get power. Ashawoo alias quasaquasa he don ton na business where he no need capital again. Paul Biya Bi Mvondõ lias cocoma he don talk say make we create. If you loose hair, gain head na you sabi, all na self-employment

Oh mama eh contri don spoil, oh mama eh contri don spoil.... Ndiefi Pius, Mokake dem not fit play again. If wonna want for play wonna change birth certificate from Mbarga Ndiefi Pius, Onana Atangana Marcus Mokake before wonna fit commut for banc de touche.

Le Cameroun de grandes ambitions. Vraiment, la corruption, discrimination he don kill we pass. If you no get godfather na for your own risk.

Université de Buea he don ton na centre de formation militaire. Dorothy Njeuma alias Margaret Thatcher he be say as daughter of the soil na caterpillar could move he for Université de Buea... Make I laugh small. For last fight na stone he move he for Université de Buea. And na today he don ton na locataire for Yaounde. Contri where youth no get age limit. Le Cameroun de grandes ambitions. Les choses à vérifier. Prof Lambi he say he no know corruption. Grande ambition laugh donc alors tu n'es pas mon fils...enlevé du fonction. Où sont les autres? Titanji come back. First strike move he second strike bring he. Vraiment les choses à vérifier. Qui a tué Bikoi Njiki? Allez demander à Buea.

Eh mama eh contri don spoil, eh mama eh contri don spoil... CPDM, UPC vraiment wanna ask dat question for SDF. Who is the chairman of the Social Democratic Front power to the people? Dem say he don ton na individual power. SDF don ton na meat where dog dem ti fight for divide tam for factions. Les choses à vérifier. Muna say na me, Fru Ndi say na me, Ngwasiri say na me. Les choses à vérifier. Na who be compositeur, auteur de SDF wona ask me?

Eh mama eh contri don spoil. Eh mama eh contri don spoil... Université de Buea he no get future again? You commut dey with kind kind diplôme de sortie na for your own risk. If you be nga alors call box ti wait you. If you be man pickin bendskin union alias welcome to motorcycle Union....

SCNC he don ton na NGO where all man ti find way for nyongo for USA. Wanna don nye weti. Na so we could take am for fix this country? Les choses à vérifier

Eh mama eh contri don spoil, eh mama eh contri don spoil... Who could fix am. Papa and mami dem wanna don fool me. Wosai the future for this contri dey? Wosai wanna don lep am? Pickin dem no get future again? Wanna no ti shame? Everyday wanna dey for salon, put me black for head, put me black for head. Na de changement dat? Wanna check skin find, wanna check find.

Eh mama eh contri don spoil, eh mama eh contri don spoil... Yaounde wanna fix am. I hear say Mamfe man is a proud man, of course.

*Na for the dust where wanna ti export tam or for the mud where
wonna ti import am? Wanna be very good for writing motions of
support...and petition writing too....*

*I go for Bamenda I shame. For labour day of course na Babanki
njama njama be ti march, prisoner dem, shoemakers, ashawoo institute
@yahoo.com*

*Eh mama contri don spoil....This contri don pass me oh, something don pass
me oh....*

In Awilo's lead album he begins a song with the lamentation 'contri don spoil,' and repeats it throughout the song. This lamentation shows clearly that Cameroon is socio-politically and economically in an abysmal state. The next statement that follows in this song is a rhetorical question *who spoil am and who could fix am?* (Who is responsible for this failure of Cameroon and who will provide the solutions or redeem the country?). These are serious questions as are others like *Wosai the future for this contri dey? Wosai wanna don lep am? Pickin dem no get future again? Wanna no ti shame?* (Where is the future of this country? Where have you kept it? Children do not have a future again? Are you not ashamed?).

There is no doubt that Cameroon's body politic is so sick that there is need for a diagnosis of its multifarious problems and for a prescription of therapies to redeem the country and its people. The roads are bad and the tarring of new roads like the Kumba-Mamfe road which is economically profitable because of the agricultural produce from the area and the trade that can be boosted with Nigeria has for decades been politicised. Again, one can hardly pass an examination or get employment as a civil servant without a godfather. These are some of the ills that Awilo detests and argues that the state is at an advanced stage of decay. Although he is pessimistic about the state of affairs in his beloved country, he is also patriotic about the future of the Cameroon. He asks "who are the culprits in these words *Who spoil am, who could fix am...?* (Who are the spoilers and who will put back things on rails?). He challenges Cameroonians, especially those in leadership positions, to rise to the challenge and give back sanity to Cameroon that its citizens so badly need.

'Awilo' also describes the daily realities of Cameroon as saddening. In his own words, Cameroon has 'fever.' This means that the country is at a stage of serious socio-political and economic decadence. Truly, 'Awilo' refers to the

numerous crises the country is going through. Many people live at the margin because of the debilitating economic situation in the country compounded by a hike in prices of basic commodities. Among the litany of crises are the grievances of Anglophones who feel marginalised simply because they speak English and come from West of the Mungo River. When civil servants chase documents in Yaounde from the two Anglophone regions, some Francophones refer to them as Anglo-fools. In response, Anglophones also call them names like 'frogs.' Within the Anglophone community there is the trivialisation of matters of the state. And precious time is spent in bickering than in building the community and country (Nkwi 2004:185-209; All Anglophone Conference Standing Committee, 1993; Abwa 2000; Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997:203-229; Ngoh 1999:165-183; Chem Langhee 1995:88-99; Fanso 1999; Ngege 2003:61-86; Jua 2003:87-110; Nkwi 2007:153-160; Tita 1993; Toh 2001; Schneider 1999; Kah 2012:71-103). Other crises of Cameroon include the 'ethnisation' of political representation, political violence, arrogance of appointed individuals, and the depletion of the country's resources with impunity and the rigging of elections at all levels of the democratic process (Gros 2003:131-165; Kah 2010:19-35; Ndeh et al 2010:121-138).

'Awilo' also examines the disgrace on Cameroon by the forces of law and order who through their activities promote lawlessness and disorder. In these words he captures the thinking of Cameroonians about the attitude of the police. *New law for Cameroon he don chop mona policier dem alias faire bien la voiture. Tu me donnes mes cinq cent comme réglé.* The disgrace its police forces have given to the country is the collection of 500 francs CFA from drivers with impunity and relish and their harassment and extortion of money from foreigners who visit the country. Paul Biya, the President of Cameroon, in one of his New Year speeches acknowledged that the police force was a disgrace to the country. Other ills of these men in uniform include drunkenness and gambling. These malpractices of the police made the present Police Boss Martin Mbarga Nguete temporarily suspend the Police from the road. This was applauded by the public although these men and women in uniform have since returned to the road and continued with their bad habits.

In the days of the Southern/West Cameroon state⁷, such offences were noticed but punished by the governing authorities. People who listen to 'Awilo's' *contri don spoil* lament that such vices were not tolerated in West Cameroon but that since reunification in 1961, the integrity of the police corps has seriously been damaged by the nonchalant and disgraceful attitude of the forces of law and order. They regret the reunification of the Cameroons and attribute vices of the men in uniform to a culture of impunity East of the Mungo which they argue often went unpunished. What is however important to note is that the policy of centralisation of administration has contributed to laxity and inertia in the public service of Cameroon. This inertia has been publicly acknowledged by the Head of State Paul Biya in several of his public speeches. While some people challenge this assertion as a stereotype not based on any rational inquiry, others attest to the fact that in the days of Southern/West Cameroon crimes committed whether by forces of law and order or ordinary citizens were severely punished⁸.

In addition, 'Awilo' also addresses two important aspects of the political culture of Cameroonians which are motions of support and at the same time petitions. His case here is the Mamfe people of Manyu Division in English speaking Cameroon. Although during the rainy season, many of them go through Bamenda, a longer distance to Mamfe, they are notorious for motions of support to the Head of State, Paul Biya and the ruling CPDM to their militancy in the party and unalloyed support to the President. One should however not be blinded to the fact that a few gullible individuals who always claim to speak for the population send these motions of support. Paradoxically, Mamfe is noted by 'Awilo' for its craftsmanship in writing petitions against fellow brethren. This culture of motions of support in Cameroon's political culture has been discussed at length by Akoko and Mbuagbo (Mbuagbo and Akoko 2004:241-258).

⁷ The state of West Cameroon came into existence on 1 October 1961 after the reunification of British Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon. The former Republic of Cameroon became the East Cameroon state. The Federal structure that brought the two territories was dismantled in 1972 after the Referendum of 20 May. The former West Cameroon was split into the North West and South West Provinces which were again renamed like other provinces as the North West and South West Regions in November 2008.

⁸ In several reports on the "Grape Vine" slot of Cameroon Calling, an English language critical programme over Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) in Yaounde, retired journalist Kevin Njomo decried the culture of impunity in Cameroon and compares it with what obtained in the State of West Cameroon between 1961 and 1972 when the Unitary state replaced the Federal state and West Cameroon was split into the North West and South West Provinces and are today known as the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon.

Motions of support have the double-prong effect of estranging and pulling people and the centre together in a cat/mouse-like relationship borne out of fear, suppression and exclusion. Through this, Cameroonian elite from across the Mungo are in a mad race in their sycophantic motions of support to please the system, themselves and displease the people in the process.

While the ordinary literature generally examines the unifying influence of football (Clignet and Stark 1974:409-421; Nkwi and Vidacs 1997; Vidacs 2003:167-184), 'Awilo' thinks that Cameroon's football is sick. Unlike in countries like Nigeria where national unity is sought and blended with talent to ensure the regional representation of players, in Cameroon many players are from the French speaking region and specifically, the Bassa ethnic group.

In the past few years the achievement curve of the national team of Cameroon is on a sharp decline and many questions are being raised by the sports-loving public of the country.

Another problem which has become a cankerworm of the Cameroon administration is the triple issue of corruption, discrimination and godfatherism. Some twenty years or so ago, some were considered a good civil servant or worker if he embezzled money and discriminated in the award of contracts or recruitment of civil servants. This was not tackled with an iron fist by the regime in place and the one before it.

It grew to a level of becoming a monster (Mbile 2000) and today corruption and discrimination have rubbed Cameroon of the virtue of goodness and rightness in the conduct of public affairs. One needs to have a godfather or protector to be sure of employment or admission into a professional school even before s/he graduates from the university. If s/he has not got any direct benefactor, then agents are used to bribe one's way into a position of responsibility in the public service.

'Awilo' focuses on political prostitution and infighting in Cameroon. Citing the example of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party he questions the person wielding real power in this political party because of the quarrels that erupted between the Chairman of the party Ni John Fru Ndi, Barrister Bernard Muna and Clement Ngwasiri. Instead of preaching power to the people of Cameroon as its slogan says, the tussle within this political party is resulting in individual power. This episode of the SDF is a tip of the iceberg in the political rigmarole in different political parties of Cameroon.

Within other political parties like the CPDM, National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP), UPC and others, individuals have wrestled for individual power. In its 2005 report of the October 2004 presidential elections in Cameroon, the National Elections Observatory (NEO) made reference to this bickering in different political parties (General Report of the Conduct of the Presidential Elections of 11 October 2004). Without a clearly defined programme as therapy to the multiple problems of Cameroon, the parties have passed for social clubs where anyone can go for entertainment or use as a base for their own personal enrichment from the state treasury. Some of the parties are regional and therefore out to serve regional and not national interest.

'Awilo' describes the Southern Cameroon National Council as an NGO which people now use to seek asylum in the United States of America and Europe. In his words he says that *SCNC he don ton na NGO where all man ti find way for nyonggo for USA* (SCNC has become an NGO which everyone uses to go to the USA). This is what has happened to some people who joined the struggle or who never even joined it but used it to travel to the USA. It is saddening to see Cameroonians West of the Mungo who were once considered as upright citizens to engage in such debasing things as these. It also tells of the level of poverty in the country that has pushed people to seek for all means possible to travel out of the country for jobs elsewhere. Many of the NGOs in the country like others elsewhere are in people's suitcases. They use them to make fast money for themselves and soon afterwards abandon the NGO business for other investments. That is how far the country has gone in its double standards of repression but at the same time in turning around to take credit for the recognition of 1 October as an important date to be recognised and celebrated in Cameroon from 2011. A few years ago, SCNC activists were imprisoned because they dared recognise and celebrate this date but today the government mobilised resources and celebrated the 50th anniversary of reunification in 2014. Where does the credit goes to, the government of Cameroon or the SCNC which started the fight for the recognition of this date? Here lie the complexities of the Cameroon nation-state in the 21st century.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to show that the problems of Cameroon today as aptly articulated by 'Awilo' in his song '*contri don spoil*' have their roots in the history of Cameroon from the colonial period. Cameroon was partitioned into two after the defeat of the Germans and evolved through French and British cultures.

After reunification in 1961, these problems became visible in the management of the affairs of the state. Today, there are multifarious socio-political and economic problems that need a strong political will to handle. As long as these problems are taken lightly by gullible governing and ruling Francophone and Anglophone elite, the country is likely to slide towards a precipice. 'Awilo' challenges right-thinking Cameroonians to rise up to the challenge and save Cameroon from total collapse. This can be made possible through a full appreciation of problems of division and reunification and addressing them. Failure to do so will only make Cameroon doomed for failure.

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