

Preface to the Second Edition

It has been almost 15 years since the publication of the first edition of *"The Cameroon GCE Crisis: A Test of Anglophone Solidarity."* Meanwhile, the Cameroon General Certificate of Education Board has been in existence for 15 years. The first edition of this publication served as a historical archive which deftly captured the complex trajectories of the crisis leading up to the creation of the GCE Board. The book paints and documents a crisis which mobilized the Anglophone community in Cameroon against a hegemonic Francophone-dominated government intent on "francophonising" the Anglophone educational system. The government's attempt to harmonise Cameroon's Francophone and Anglophone educational systems, was perceived in most Anglophone quarters as an attempt to dilute a stellar educational system and further co-opt them into a union maligned from independence. On the other hand, the government cast their struggle as an attempt to crystallize the unification project embarked upon since independence and formalized in 1972. These disparate interpretations of intent led a unified Anglophone community on a collision course with the government.

The street battles and press wars that ensued pitted a well organized Anglophone community, dedicated to the principles of non-violent protest against governmental authority which was all too quick to use the showers of water cannons and the truncheon of force to silence the protesters. Beyond these confrontations, the first edition of this book also provided glimpses into the organizational ability of the Anglophone community to mobilize themselves into different groups. Such groups as the Teachers Association of Cameroon (TAC), the Confederation of Anglophone Parents' Teachers' Association of Cameroon (CAPTAC), the churches and various associations served as vehicles and platforms for the mobilization of solidarity, unity of purpose and commitment to the virtues of a way of life.

Meanwhile, the negotiations which led to the resolution of the GCE crisis took both Anglophone government insiders and outsiders to press on the salience and resolve of the

community to stand up against the erosion of a system which it valued dearly. The churches and the media in Cameroon, as civil society actors, were sucked into the crisis in varying capacities and with fascinating lessons for future collective action. While the churches sought to defuse a potentially explosive situation, the private press in Anglophone Cameroon provided a vibrant space for Anglophones to articulate their grievances and debate the challenges of the problematic co-habitation imposed on them by the 1961 Plebiscite. The government media also continued to champion the defences of governmental authority. The Anglophone community was not willing to witness the dilution of an educational system which had proved to be internationally competitive, and had produced its first frontline of government officials and representatives, some of whom were involved in the GCE crisis.

However, time has provided varying degrees of separation between the actors, the structures and the crisis which necessitates some analytical retrospection in order to provide a more holistic appreciation of the GCE crisis. This re-examination provides the rationale for a second edition which includes greater historical insights and insider perspectives on the crisis. Some 15 years after the creation of the GCE Board, it becomes necessary to ask the difficult question as to whether it was all worth the fight; whether it has made any difference; whether we can evaluate the GCE Board today in any certain terms. This assessment can only be done within a context of understanding the complex organizational, functional and financial relationship between the GCE Board and the Ministry of National Education which is ostensibly supposed to be its host Ministry. To what extent has the GCE Board enjoyed the financial independence and institutional autonomy needed to promote and protect the excellence and ideals it was created to guarantee?

This edition of *The Cameroon GCE Crisis: A Test of Anglophone Solidarity* goes behind the newspaper headlines and street protests with Andrew Azong Wara, the pioneer registrar of the Cameroon GCE Board. Azong Wara contributes an insider's perspective from his dual roles as leader of the Teachers' Association of Cameroon and the pioneer registrar of the Cameroon GCE Board from 1993 to 1997. His narrative is backed by a historical appreciation of the origins of the

“cameroonisation” of the GCE in 1976 and subsequent attempts by the government to transform the administration of the examination. Since the first edition of this publication ended with the formation of the GCE Board and the promulgation of the text of implementation for the Board, this edition goes a step further.

Using the distance provided by time, Andrew Azong Wara goes back to describe the challenges which the GCE Board endured during its initial years of existence. His account captures the relational complexities which evolved between the Ministry of National Education and the GCE Board in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the Board. These complexities had to be dealt with for the GCE Board to become sustainable and successful. Hence Azong Wara provides insights into the negotiations between the leadership of the Board and the Ministry of National Education as well as the sacrifices made by the broader Anglophone community to see the successful functioning of the GCE Board. His contribution also captures the relationships which the GCE Board developed with the many stakeholders and constituencies it was called to relate to.

Another innovation in this edition is the contribution by His Lordship Paul Verdzekov, former Archbishop of the Bamenda Archdiocese. The Catholic Church, through the Council of Bishops and together with other churches contributed significantly both in foregrounding the pertinent issues and in tempering the tensions. However, this contribution goes beyond a description of the role of the churches in the GCE crisis. It provides a flashback with insights into the state of the educational system in former British Southern Cameroons, a system subverted by the administrative control of the centralized government in Yaoundé after independence. Given the juxtaposition of this historical perspective with the systemic changes proposed by the government of Cameroon, the rationale underlying the resolve of the Anglophone Cameroon teachers, parents and students becomes even more evident. It shows a pre-independence educational system which was not only about the production of certificate-carriers but favoured the nurturing of well-rounded and morally upright citizens. It becomes clear that the broader context of cultural dichotomization between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon could not be solved

unless equity was infused into the negotiation of a broad harmonious post-independence existence within and beyond the educational sector.

The comprehensive nature of contributions in this book provides a rich and invaluable archive documenting the collective memory of the struggles over the heart and soul of the Anglophone educational system in Cameroon. It is a reader on the negotiation, challenges and renegotiation of solidarities, belonging, recognition and representation in Cameroon within the Anglophone community on the one hand, and between Anglophones and Francophones on the other. In the voices of the actors in the struggles over the GCE, the readers are given a guided tour on the making and unmaking of communities in a place called Cameroon.

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The attempt by the Government of Cameroon to reform the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination in 1983 unleashed a socio-political firestorm around Anglophone minority marginalisation and co-optation. This book traces the 10 year historical trajectory of battles that were fought from 1983 to October 1993 for the preservation of the General Certificate of Education examinations in Cameroon. These battles opposed a mobilised and determined Anglophone civil society against numerous machinations by successive governments to dilute the GCE with the rather shallow Francophone secondary education system.

This book has become possible thanks to Dr. Nyamnjoh. As a socio-historical project, it captures their active participation from the initial stages of the struggle to maintain the educational system they had enjoyed and did not want to see perish. In the process, Dr. Nyamnjoh kept notes, pictures and invaluable documents that today provide the basis for the authenticity of this historical account.

As a librarian at the University of Yaoundé I also bore witness to the early part of the struggle. While it is difficult for anyone to claim personal victory for the final outcomes, it is necessary to salute the courage and determination of the Anglophone students of the University of Yaoundé, Missionary bodies, the Anglophone teachers of Secondary Education acting under the umbrella of the powerful Teacher's Association of Cameroon (TAC), and the parents whose efforts were channelled both individually and collectively through the Parent-Teacher Associations.

It is no doubt that the culminating incident in the ten year's saga came on 12th October 1993 when well over one thousand Anglophone parents demonstrated in front of the Ministry of National Education in Yaoundé. With their determination at the zenith, they braved all odds, stood their grounds and suffered the humiliation and human degradation of being sprayed with police water cannons and thrashed with rubber truncheons. Many suffered grave injuries in the process. Simultaneous street demonstrations took place in Bamenda. On

that fateful 12th October, the text granting autonomy to the GCE Examination Board was signed.

This book's factual and well documented narrative will be real history tomorrow. It will be worthwhile having a copy for your library more especially so because it is no denying the fact that the story in the book is also part of the history of the struggle for the liberation of Anglophones in Cameroon.

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