

THE BUILDING OF A DICTATORSHIP: READING GILBERT ANDZÉ TSOUNGUI IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF CAMEROON HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Those familiar with twentieth century Cameroon's political history are well acquainted with Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui, an emblematic postcolonial leader and close ally to Presidents Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya. Andzé Tsoungui died in April 2007 in Brussels, Belgium. Unlike many other political leaders, he did not publish any political memoir or autobiography. Historians and political analysts were, indeed, expecting him to lift the veil on some defining moments of his political career. Instead of serving the Cameroonian intellectual community with a workable tool of public policy and historical analysis, Andzé Tsoungui posthumously published *Ordre et Liberté*, a platonic and blank narrative of concepts such as law, justice, public order, and freedom.²

For a senior state official of the caliber of Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui, one of the country's chief architect of the current tyranny, to have published a book like "Law and Order" upon his death is a sign of patriotic disrespect to Cameroonian collective conscience and history. While still waiting for Andze's memoirs, that will never come, there are qualms about offering an independent historical analysis of political leadership in postcolonial Cameroon. Indeed, the foremost authority enjoyed by Andzé Tsoungui will almost provide additional information about unclassified and informal sources. As such, I submit this historical analysis of Tsoungui's political life out of conviction that its significance for the "dark history of Cameroon" should not be left to state officials and their inner circle.

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² Gilbert A. Tsoungui, *Ordre et Liberté: Ordre et Maintien de L'Ordre et Respect des Droits de L'Homme dans les Pays en Voie de Développement* (April 2007).

This essay argues that Andzé Tsoungui was one of the last survivors from that generation with an intimate knowledge of the unknown details of post-colonial history, the bloody decolonization, the crushing of nationalist movements, the reign of terror under Ahidjo, and the emasculation of the Cameroon opposition in the 1990s. The bulk of the analysis coalesces around two selected clusters of Andze's political career: the collaboration with the French colonial powers from the early days of independence to the last days of the Union de Populations du Cameroun (UPC) rebellion in the mid-1970s, and his controversial management of the Cameroon's incoherent transition to democracy in the 1990s.

2. A Biographical Sketch: From Independence to the Maquis Rebellion

As in many historical analyses, refreshing a biographical background helps to recall that both Andzé Tsoungui and the construction of his image exist within specific circumstances in concrete history. That perspective is important for making sense of the recent discovery of what could be dubbed 'a failure of democratic responsibility and patriotism.' It is worth noting that the time in which Andzé Tsoungui lived on the issues that defined him as a statesman does not differ sharply from those confronting the Cameroonian society today. Therefore, understanding Andzé Tsoungui's behavior requires an examination of the ways in which political leadership has evolved since independence.

A notable and concise bibliography of Andzé Tsoungui is offered by Mark DeLancey, Cameroon expert and Director of Graduate Studies in Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina.³ Born in 1930 at Nkolondom, Yaoundé, Andzé Tsoungui completed a distance learning law program at the University of Dakar, Senegal. His career began in the mid-1950s when he was appointed assistant to the Sub-Divisional Officer (*Sous-Préfet*) of Nanga Eboko. In 1958, he was transferred to Douala as assistant to the head of

³ Mark W. DeLancey and Mark Dike DeLancey, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Cameroon* 3rd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2000); 2nd ed. By Mark W. DeLancey and H. Mbella Mokeba.

the Wouri Region. This was at the height of the UPC insurgency of which Wouri, along with the Sanaga Maritime and the Western Province were the hotbeds.

After a brief stint in the Eastern Province, he was appointed the Divisional Officer for the Mungo Division, Nkongsamba, in 1961. Andzé Tsoungui's primary mission was to crush the UPC rebellion in the Bamiléké, Mungo, and Sanaga Maritime hinterlands by any means necessary. He worked in close collaboration with Jean Fochivé, the head of Cameroon's intelligence service.⁴ Andzé Tsoungui successfully carried out this assignment until 1963 when he was promoted to the position of Federal Inspector for the entire Littoral region (which included Mungo and Wouri). In 1965 he was transferred to the Western Region still as the Federal Inspector, the equivalent of our modern day Governor.

It was under Andzé Tsoungui's mandate that Ernest Ouandié (1924-1971), the charismatic leader of the UPC movement was arrested in August 1970 alongside Nkongsamba Bishop Albert Ndogmo, tried, sentenced to death, and executed on January 15, 1971 in Bafoussam behind the present day *Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et L'Industrie du Cameroun* (BICIC).⁵ Other nationalists executed on the occasion included Celestin Takala, Raphael Fotsing, Ouandié's alleged liaison with Ndongmo, and Gabriel Tabeu alias Wambo le Courant leader of a religious movement whose aim was to assassinate Ahmadou Ahidjo (1924-1989).⁶ Although Bishop Ndogmo was critical of government's exploitative policies vis-à-vis the poor and had close ties with the UPC rebellion, he was accused of being the mastermind of a coup to overthrow Ahmadou Ahidjo. The local leadership of the Catholic Church under Archbishop Jean Zoa (1924-1998)

⁴ From December 1961 through 1971, Jean Fochivé served cumulatively as head of the Intelligence Department, *Services D'Études et de la Documentation* (SEDOC), and as chief of Presidential Security.

⁵ On a provocative account of the UPC rebellion in the grassfields hinterlands, see Achille Mbembe, *La Naissance du Maquis dans Louest Cameroun* (Paris: Karthala, 1996). See also, Blaise Alfred Ngando, *La France au Cameroun, 1916 – 1939: Colonialisme ou Mission Civilisatrice?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); Victor T. LeVine, *The Cameroons from Mandate to Independence* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1964).

⁶ Dibussi Tande, "Memory Lane: January 15, 1971 - UPC Leader, Ernest Ouandié, Executed," Scribes of the Den Blog, April 2007, http://www.dibussi.com/2007/04/individual_memo.html.

supported the death sentence. Many foreign political figures, including the French Socialist leader Francois Mitterrand (1916-1996; head of state, 1981 - 1995), and Pope Paul VI (born 1897; papacy 1963-1978), called for clemency, especially on the preacher's behalf. Upon Vatican's formal insistence in what is known in Cameroon popular language as "Kill Ndogmo but give me back my Bishop" (Tuez Ndogmo mais donnez-moi Monseigneur), the clergyman's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by President Ahmadou Ahidjo.

Upon his early release, Ndogmo leaves the country in 1975. Many scholars believe that the Ndogmo affair led to the formal collapse of the UPC rebellion in the Western Bamiléké countryside, and should be seen, therefore, as a great victory for Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui and the state.⁷ On July 3, 1972, Ahidjo moved Andzé Tsoungui from the Western Province and promoted him as minister delegate at the state inspectorate in his inaugural Federal Government. Later on, Andzé will be succeeded at that position by Charles Onana Awana. From there, the Nkolondom patriarch is assigned the ministry of agriculture (1975-1978) and then the portfolio of justice (1978-1983) before being recalled to the department of agriculture (1983-1983).

3. Diverting Cameroon's Transition to Multiparty and Democracy

When Paul Biya felt the danger approaching his power after rumors of a coup d'état circulated in August 1983, Andzé Tsoungui was immediately removed from agriculture department to become the first Minister of Armed Forces not of Northern origin (1983-1985). During the foiled coup d'état of April 6, 1984, Andzé Tsoungui set up a secret command post to organize the recapture of strategic locations of the capital city by loyal forces. In the aftermath of the coup, he emerged as a powerful figure, calling for vigilance and firmness by the state, and contradicting Paul Biya that all rebels hailed from the North Province.⁸

⁷ DeLancey and Mokeba, *Historical Dictionary*, 147.

⁸ DeLancey and Mokeba, *Historical Dictionary*, 25-26.

From August 1985, the former Ministry of Armed Forces, officially disbanded, became an integral part of the Office of the Presidency, headed by a Minister Delegate in Charge of Defense (*Ministre Délégué à la Présidence de la République Chargé de la Défense*), thereby confirming the Head of State in his attributes of Commander in Chief. At the outset, the change from “armed forces” to “defense” was to alter the psychological determinants of human attitude by assigning a more “patriotic” role to the military - the defense of national sovereignty, and Andzé Tsoungui was selected to re-occupy this strategic portfolio. Subsequent Minister Delegates for Defense in the Paul Biya administration include very close allies: Jérôme Emilien Abondo (1985-1986), Michel Meva’a M’Eboutou (1986-1990), Edouard Akame Mfoumou (1990-1996), Philippe Menye Me Mve (1996-1997), Amadou Ali (1997-2001), Laurent Easo (2001-2004), and Remy Ze Meka (2004-present).

In April 1989, Andzé Tsoungui returned to national prominence as Delegate General for National Security. When the specter of multiparty politics began signaling itself in the early 1990s, Paul Biya decided to put order in the house through a redistribution of political roles. Appointed as Minister of Territorial Administration (MINAT) on December 7, 1990 when the mass protests broke out, Andzé Tsoungui played a central role in crushing the nationwide opposition movements, students’ “parliament” insurrection at the University of Yaoundé and the “villes mortes” (ghost-town) campaign that severely shook Cameroon to upheavals in the early 1990s. In May 1991, the University of Yaoundé was closed following the suppression of student demonstrations; 7 of the 10 provinces were placed under military rule; and in June the government prohibited meetings of opposition parties. A general strike was called by the National Coordination Committee of Opposition Parties (NCCOP), in November, the ban on opposition gatherings is revoked; and in December, military rule in the 7 provinces ends.

As Minister in charge of the entire electoral process, Gilbert Andzé Tsoungui was the ring master behind the highly controversial presidential elections of October 1992 that many Cameroonians and independent observers unanimously believe were won by the Social Democratic Front (SDF) chairman Ni John Fru Ndi.⁹ In Cameroon, officers of the ministry of territorial administration possess unlimited, broad, discretionary, and above all, abusive powers in the conduct of electoral proceedings. In other words, government-appointed officials at both the divisional and sub-divisional levels known as the Senior Divisional Officers (SDO) and Divisional Officers (DO) (préfets and sous-préfets) are the only ones entitled to issue electoral cards, draft voting lists, establish procedures for voter registration, determine both the number and the locations of voting places, implement and interpret voting procedures.

Days before the election, Andzé Tsoungui used his state powers as minister of territorial administration to issue an executive order requesting all voting bulletins to be destroyed and burnt immediately after the final count at polling stations. By destroying any documentary evidence, this measure proved successful, in so far as it completely annihilated any likelihood of recount to challenge the truthfulness of results submitted by various pro-CPDM administrations. On October 2, Jean Fochivé, Secretary of State for Internal Security, sent a telex to all Cameroon diplomatic missions to “respectfully... deny visa to any person claiming to be observer to presidential election without invitation from our government.”¹⁰ It came to my attention that we could easily borrow from Professor Melone’s reference to “dangerous preparations” (préparatifs dangereux) in his memorable teachings on general principles of criminal law to better grasp the significance of Andzé Tsoungui and Fochivé’s executive order and telex.¹¹

⁹ “John Fru Ndi: Le Ras-de Marée, Mais Paul Biya Conserve le Pouvoir,” *Jeune Afrique Economie*, November 1992.

¹⁰ Telex October 2, 1992, DGSN, CSPSNC, 03401/3A/PC/DGSN/CAB, reproduced by NDI, Appendix 58.

¹¹ Stanislas Melone, *Droit Pénal Général, Notes de Lectures* (Lecture Notes, General Principles of Criminal Law), University of Yaoundé, 1990.

Being the Minister in charge of territorial administration, Andzé Tsoungui acted as the chief law enforcement organ, and his responsibilities also included management of the civil service staff and the whole administrative system. Voting laws in Cameroon provided for the creation of multiparty commissions (Divisional Supervisory Commissions) to tabulate votes at the divisional level. However, the electoral code was that it did not allow opposition parties to be present at the critical sub-divisional level where polling place results were initially transmitted. It was at this level that DOs supposedly verified the results, changed original figures before sending them to SDOs who, in turn, transferred them to Divisional Supervisory Commissions for the final tally.

After the October 1992 presidential election, Andzé Tsoungui was rewarded with a promotion as Deputy Prime Minister, and State Minister in Charge of Territorial Administration (1992-1997). There is room to argue that Andzé Tsoungui's promotion within the state apparatus was a reward from the hierarchy for his "hold up" of the democratic process during October 1992 presidential elections that ended with the legitimacy of the illegitimate results. While the SDF and its "power to the people" syndrome were completely weakened through fiercely orchestrated "divide and rules" tactics, Andzé Tsoungui was replaced on a "mission accompli" by Samson Ename Ename as Minister of Territorial Administration (1997-2000) and sent to rest as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Credit Agricole du Cameroon.

The loose management of the 1992 election was severely contested by some of Andzé Tsoungui's and Paul Biya's close affiliates. It is from this perspective that we should read the resignation of George Mofor Achu, Governor of the East Province, on October 19. In his resignation letter to Paul Biya, Achu revealed instructions from Andzé Tsoungui to do "everything fair and foul to ensure at least a 60 percent victory for the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement

(CPDM) party candidate.”¹² Achu, whose life was in danger, fled persecution and harassment on ideological and political grounds and immediately sought refuge in the United States. On this ground, Andzé Tsoungui is largely portrayed in the public conscience as the man who saved Paul Biya’s régime.¹³ On the same footing, Andzé Tsoungui could be validly portrayed as the “strategic engineer” or “the grandfather of electoral fraud” in the Cameroonian political culture.

Dating back to October 12, 1992, Andzé Tsoungui partnered with communications minister Augustin K. Kontchou to broadcast partial results of the presidential elections, thereby violating the dispositions of the Electoral Law of September 17, 1992 which clearly and solely entrusted such a responsibility to the Supreme Court. On October 28, William Eteki Mboumoua, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), speaking from France, formally condemned such unlawful inroads into the electoral regulations by officers whose duty is to enforce them. When Alexis Dipanda, President of the Supreme Court, announced the results on October 23 on the basis of reports submitted by the national commission of elections, the verdict added a severe police brutality, man hunting, press ban, and a state of emergency in the North West Province. John Fru Ndi and 152 others, who were confined under house arrest, received visits from eminent diplomats, delegates from foreign governments, including Desmond Tutu, Cape Town Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1984).

There is a trend in history scholarship that by 1992, Cameroon ended the third year of democratic transition somberly. In other words, the two elections were no

¹² National Democratic Institute Affairs for International Affairs (NDI), *An Assessment of the October 11, 1992 Election in Cameroon*, http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/060_cm_assessment.pdf especially 109 – 111; NDI, “Democratization in Cameroon: International Delegation Report,” October 1991, http://www.accessdemocracy.org/library/059_cm_democratization.pdf.

¹³ David Nouwou, “L’Homme Qui Sauva Le Régime de Paul Biya, » *La Nouvelle Expression*, April, 11, 2007.

easy road to democratization or panacea for the country's cumulative crisis.¹⁴ The democratic experience opened more wounds than it healed and very likely caused consumers of the political game unrealistic and misguided expectations. Though the state apparatus plugged its gaps and checked or reversed civil society's advances through the early elections and crack down, it failed to restore its credibility abroad because of prevailing electoral flaws and corruption. Rather than any effective democracy taking place, let alone consolidation; indecisive, miscalculated, egoistic, and individualist calculations became the fabric of political culture in Cameroon.¹⁵

Although multiparty elections were held in 1992, the flawed electoral contest represented a step backward in the Cameroon's democratization process. The widespread electoral irregularities were attributed principally by international observers to the government undermined public confidence in President Biya's professed commitment to political reforms. The inability to tolerate diversity and freedom of thought turned out to be the "weakest and most vulnerable point" in the Cameroonian electoral circus.¹⁶ In the end, democratic irregularities failed to restore confidence in the justice process and the decency of the Cameroonian government. To a degree that is difficult to appreciate today, the nation is still running on corruption, violence, intimidation, militarism, and lack of transformative political and socio-economic leadership.¹⁷ Such opposites, discouragement, and abdication, had a more lethal and dangerous meaning to the national economy than initially expected. These recriminations, condemning as they must have been against the national government, actually masked a vast erosion of trust in public authorities. It remains a sliver in a wound that would not heal in the years yet to come.

¹⁴ Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger, *African State And Society In The 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads* (Westview Press, 2000); John Mukum Mbaku and John Takougang (eds.), *The Leadership Challenge in Africa: Cameroon Under Paul Biya* (Africa World Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Takougang and Krieger, *African State and Society*, 150ff.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

4. Conclusion

Andzé Tsoungui applied his greatest influence during the 1990s democratic transitions and rapidly came to the fore when calls for multipartism broke out. President Paul Biya found it necessary to rely heavily on his knowledge of local administration and authoritarianism to shift the ballot in favor of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). He was acutely sensitive to criticism of the regime. He was indignant when newspapers published columns discrediting the regime. Yet the direction of change in the administration's policies across a variety of issue areas veered consistently from a liberal strategy of management toward a more conservative strategy of resistance and aggression.

During his funerals that took place on May 5, 2007 at Nkolondom, Prime Minister Inoni Ephraim portrayed and praised Andzé Tsoungui as "a dedicated statesman and an epitome of patriotism, with an exceptional attachment to the unity, and integrity of the country." Paul Biya, Inoni added, saw in Andzé, "an individual who served the country with selflessness and a high sense of duty a man of courage, loyalty, and devotion."¹⁸ Despite the idealistic rhetoric in which Paul Biya chose to cover up his management of the democratization game, virtually all of his administration's policies reflected ideas widely advocated on purely conservative, undemocratic, and irrational grounds.

¹⁸ "State Pays Tribute to Departed Andzé Tsoungui," Press Release, Office of the Prime Minister of Cameroon, May 2007, available at http://www.spm.gov.cm/detail_art.php?id_art=1313&type=simpl&lang=en.