



## Research Article

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## Southern Cameroons Women in the 11 February 1961 Plebiscite Campaigns: The Power of Campaign Songs

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**Abstract:** The subalterns constitute in many cases that group of people that colonialism silenced as far as the political developments of colonial territories were concerned. In the Southern Cameroons these groups particularly women formed songs which animated political rallies when the future of the territory was to be decided in a UN organised 11 February 1961 plebiscite. The songs were in support of the reunification with the republic of Cameroon option which appeared to be the most popular option at the time.<sup>1</sup> Today when the reunification story is recounted in the territory this group is often side-lined and the activities of men particularly the male elite dominate the mainstream discourses. Using primary and secondary sources and a historical approach, the study argues that a number of songs composed by the subaltern women of the Southern Cameroons on the eve of the 11 February 1961 plebiscite made reunification with the republic of Cameroon option popular and contributed to the victory of this option in the territory.

**Keywords:** Colonial Territories, UN, Songs, Women, Republic of Cameroon.

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## INTRODUCTION

Many historians have addressed the importance of oral sources in the construction of African history. To Walters Gam Nkwi, oral history has been coalesced by many years of debates, postulation, and acceptance.<sup>2</sup> Ker Apegba argues that politicians employ songs, music and dance to enhance their political fortunes during electioneering campaigns and even after.<sup>3</sup> The women of the Southern Cameroons who embraced the reunification option employed a number of ways to ensure a victory for the reunification option. Their power to convince and make people to follow them had been tested in 1958 during the *Anlu* women uprising in Kom.<sup>4</sup> However, the 1961 plebiscite was very different as the result was going to determine the future of the territory of the Southern Cameroons.

Singing in general represented many things and included anger, hatred, sorrow and anxiety. Of the many purposes that music served, it served as a weapon of group identity of women during the campaigns for the plebiscite. Throughout the Southern Cameroons, women continuously used songs as a means to air out their wishes and aspirations. They used songs before to express sorrow and anger over the exploitation of their resources; to express disenchantment with the local collaborators of the colonial administration and to press for the liberation of their territory from foreign domination.<sup>5</sup> Women manifested their support for the reunification drive through several ways: they composed pro-reunification songs, which were sung all over the Southern Cameroons to sensitize the people on the issues at stake in the territory. As it appeared, many women by 1961 were not still aware of the political options in the territory.

<sup>1</sup> The other option called for integration with the independent federation of Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> Walters Nkwi, *Voicing the Voiceless: Contributions to Closing Gaps in Cameroon History 1958-2009* (Bamenda: Langaa Publishing and Research CIG, 2010), 40. Some of the researchers and scholars of African history who first championed oral sources as a foundation of history include T.O Ranger, Kenneth O. Dike, Jan Vansina, and B.A Ogot.

<sup>3</sup> Ker. Apegba, "Song, Music and Dance as Instruments of Political Violence in Tivland of Benue State, Nigeria," *Epsa Moto, A Bilingual Journal of the Arts, Letters and Humanities*. 4, no. 1 (2009): 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Anlu* literally means to drive away. This was a sacred society in Kom which regulated the activities of women. In most cases, their role was disciplinary.

<sup>5</sup> H. Kam Kah, "Women's Resistance in Cameroon Western Grassfields. The Power of Symbol, Organization and Leadership 1957 – 1961," *African Studies Quarterly*, vol 12, 2011 available at <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v12/v12i3a4.pdf>., accessed on August 2016, 79

Some of the pro-reunification songs originated from the elite and spread to the subalterns, others flowed from the subalterns and were copied by the elite in their reunification struggle. Some of the songs originated from the Southern Cameroons women especially those from the Bamenda grasslands who had followed their husbands to the coast (Victoria, Buea and Kumba) as housewives. Others were composed lyrics in praise of the reunification option. The underlying aim of all the songs was directed towards supporting the reunification drive, which was accepted by some of the Southern Cameroons prominent politicians notably S.T Muna, J.N Foncha, A.N Jua, E.T. Egbe, D.M. Frambo and W.N.O. Effiom.<sup>6</sup>

The songs were originally sung in Pidgin English, others were sung in Bakweri and yet, others were sung in Bafaw and Kenyang while others were sung in the local dialects of the Bamenda grasslands. A number of the composed lyrics were in the English language. All the songs had a central theme, that of liberation from Nigeria and reunification with the republic of Cameroon. Although women were acting behind the scenes as far as the debate concerning the reunification was concerned, the songs composed by them animated the political scenes especially during political rallies and campaigns. The songs instilled nationalist feelings in the common women, and involved them in the struggle. The once reserved Southern Cameroons women came out of their closet and were increasingly active as they became an important element, with their songs being an important interlude during party rallies and campaigns. The advent of these songs also strengthened ethnic tensions, as most of the songs were composed following ethnic leanings.<sup>7</sup>

In the Bamenda grasslands, while the elite women such as Josepha Mua and Anna Foncha took pains to compose some of the songs, the subalterns often sang weird songs which were often accompanied by whistles. When the subalterns sang, the messages in the songs and the bodily gesticulations of the women told the relationship between the traditional institutions of women. Since they knew that it took some organized actions for their wishes to be attained, they sang praises to popular politicians such as AN Jua and JN Foncha. These politicians, they believed, were in a better position to carry their grievances to the right quarters. For instance, in the Wum area during the époque of the *Kelu* and the *Anlu* women uprisings, some of the songs praised Augustine Ngom Jua. Some of the pro-reunification and pro-KNDP campaign songs were “Mr Foncha Tell Endeley Say” “Mutembe Wereke” “Vote Foncha for Cameron’s Unity” and “Reception of Foncha from the UN”.

#### **Song 1: Mr Foncha Tell Endeley Say:**

*Mr Foncha tell Endeley say,  
Small no be sick,  
Cameroon na we country,  
Na there they be born we,  
Na there they go bury we.*<sup>8</sup>

The above song was composed during the height of the political struggle in the Southern Cameroons between Foncha, who advocated independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon and Endeley who advocated independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria. This particular song became the hymn of the reunificationists and it was sang throughout the Southern Cameroons. It was composed in the Pidgin English with the intention of reaching a wider audience. The phrase ‘small no be sick’ was widely used in the territory because of the small stature of Foncha.

According to Veronica Sangbong, “the small no be sick” referred to Foncha. As opposed to Endeley who was well built, Foncha was small in size and shorter than Endeley. To the women, the song was meant to tell Endeley that the fact that Foncha was smaller did not mean incapability. That no matter his size, he was going to take them to Cameroon, the land of their birth where they preferred to die than be taken to Nigeria, the land of the unknown, where all they have heard coming from there were horrible stories.<sup>9</sup> This version was also shared by many people in the Mamfe and Kumba divisions. It however opposes another school of thought that “small no be sick” referred to the Southern Cameroons as compared to Nigeria. This group argues that the Southern Cameroons was very tiny as compared to Nigeria. Joining Nigeria therefore would have been a drop of water in an ocean.<sup>10</sup>

During Foncha’s campaign tours, he told the people how he could not finish his education in Nigeria because of the cruel attitude of the Nigerians; that those families sending children to Nigeria for studies had to pray hard because he

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Lydia Nkuhgong, retired politician, , Bamenda, July 17, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Lydia Nkuhgong, retired politician, Bamenda, July 17, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The above song was given by Anna Foncha as she recounted that during the days of political climax in the Southern Cameroons, they used to sing the song during their meetings, political rallies and social gatherings.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Sangbong Veronica, retired politician,, December 12, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Agbor John Beteck, Second Deputy Mayor Mamfe, Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

himself had narrowly escaped death while studying in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> All these stories whether genuine or made up went a long way to foster the determination of the women to see union with Nigeria as an impossible thing. This stance was further strengthened by the treatment given to Cameroonians by the Igbo on their own land (Cameroon).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that besides Endeley being more physically built up than Foncha, Endeley had also acquired a doctorate degree which gave him an edge over Foncha. Therefore, the “small” in the above song could have meant anything- from Foncha’s physical features to his limited educational background.

Another story associated with the above song is that Endeley thought that Cameroon was too small to stand on its own, so it could only survive if it was integrated into the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Endeley and his supporters claimed that Nigeria was big and was better developed than the Southern Cameroons. To them, if the Southern Cameroons should join Nigeria, then it may benefit from the social services that the Nigerians were already enjoying. On the other hand, those who opposed integration with Nigeria saw integration as a situation where Nigeria was going to completely engulf or swallow the Southern Cameroons since it was the bigger country. After all, in science, it has been proven that a stronger solution draws unto itself a weaker one. What Southern Cameroonians did not want was to be soaked up by Nigeria. Their union with Nigeria since 1922 with the creation of the League of Nations and Britain’s determination to administer the territory as an appendage of Nigeria, and from 1946 as part of the Eastern Region, had yielded very little in terms of benefit to the people of the Southern Cameroons.

Southern Cameroons until the 1960s did not have any government secondary school except for schools operated by the missionaries. Very few roads in this region had been tarred such as Victoria-Buea and Victoria-Tiko. The main stretch of road that linked the Southern Cameroons to Nigeria from Mamfe through Ekok-Calabar was not tarred. As far as development was concerned, the Southern Cameroons was still backward, and they blamed this on their union with Nigeria. The song was meant to create awareness among Cameroonians that although their numbers and territory were small, Cameroon was their land of birth. Moreover, for every good patriot, the best they could do was to fight and die for their country Cameroon, than to hope to join a country whose ways were strange to Southern Cameroonians.

### **Song 2: Mutembe Wereke**

*Mutembe Wereke!*  
*Vote for the White Box!*  
*Mutembe Wereke!*  
*Vote for the White Box!*  
*Billy sep sep*  
*Vote for the White Box!*<sup>13</sup>

This was a popular campaign song formed by women when the campaigns were getting tougher and tougher. According to Lydia Nkuhgong, in this song the women are saying that everybody should vote for the white box. It was a marching song. The emigrants from the grasslands who were resident at the coastal towns of the Southern Cameroons sang it. The song was a command rather than a plea. It called for everyone to vote for the white box.

The United Nations decided on two colour boxes which the electorates were to choose: the Green and White boxes. The Green box was for integration with Nigeria while the white box was for reunification with French Cameroon. Since the battle had already been won beforehand in the Bamenda grasslands as ethnic sentiments were so strong, and the people were bound to follow their political leaders, the battle was to be fought harder in the coastal and forest regions. This is because there were the strongholds of Endeley, the political leader who supported integration with Nigeria. The Bamenda grasslands women who had followed their husbands to the coastal regions (who had either gained employment in the British army, in the British firms or as plantation workers), were those who championed the course to convince other grassfielders and if possible the coastal population to vote for the white box.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Agbor John Beteck, Second Deputy Mayor Mamfe, Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

<sup>12</sup> The British after the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 decided to administer their own portion of Cameroon as an integral part of Nigeria. This new dispensation caused many Nigerians to migrate into the Southern Cameroons for business, trade and other activities. Due to the fact that the Southern Cameroons was still backward in terms of education as compared to Nigeria, educated people for positions of trust in the Southern Cameroons were all Nigerians. They were enlightened and more in number as compared to the population of the British Southern Cameroons. The Nigerians occupied the security (police and judiciary). The Igbo, who were the dominant Nigerian ethnic group in Cameroon by culture, were a group that wanted to impose and dominate. They carried a superiority complex in the Southern Cameroons. The Southern Cameroonians on the other hand, wanted to conserve their identity. This therefore developed an Ibo phobia in the territory of the Southern Cameroons.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lydia Nkuhgong, retired politician Bamenda, 16 July 2016

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Lydia Nkuhgong, retired politician, , Bamenda, July 17, 2016

The coastal populations especially the Bakweri did not cherish working in the plantations. This forced labour recruiters during the German protectorate (1884-1916) such as Eugene Zintgraff to look for labour elsewhere. A majority of labourers came from the Bamenda grasslands.<sup>15</sup> Ethnic tensions were therefore a prominent feature during the struggle for independence in the Southern Cameroons especially in Victoria division where all the ethnic groups were found. According to Nfi:

The plebiscite results confirmed Endeley's fears. While the grasslanders generally voted for reunification, the coastal indigenes especially the Bakweri, Bakossi, Balondo, Bakundu, and Bassosi voted against it. In Kumba Division, the indigenous people led by Hon Francis N. Ajebe-Sone, N.N Nasako, R.N Charley, K. Achang de Bohn, R.N Ntoko voted solidly for union with Nigeria. In the Kumba North East, Kumba South East and Kumba South West constituencies where the majority voted for reunification, it was realized that the grassland settlers were those who inflated the votes in favor of reunification.<sup>16</sup>

The efforts made by the Bamenda grasslands women living in the coast paid off as they, through their songs, garnered votes for the reunification option in a purely integrationist context or milieu.

The song as can be seen was composed in the coastal language. (Bakweri). The reason for this was that the song was intended to reach a wider and particular audience- the coastal inhabitants. Composing it in the grasslands languages would not have paid much as most of the grasslanders were already potential reunificationists. The women were aware that they were living in an environment where they were not welcomed. At first, the coastal inhabitants were jealous of their enterprising character.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Ebune admitted this when he said that "the Bakweri Improvement Union (BIU) protected the collective identity of the Bakweri who feared subjugation by other immigrant groups in the towns".<sup>18</sup> Among these groups, he mentioned the Bali, Meta, Kom, Nso and Bafut from the grassland region.<sup>19</sup> Through their hard work and enterprise, they raised money and bought patches of land from the coastal people where they put up permanent houses. With their own houses at the coast, these grassland immigrants did not only get married but also invited close relatives to accompany them to the coast in search for jobs. To them, the jobs were numerous in the coast but absent in the grasslands. Eventually, the coastal population gave them derogatory appellations such as "graffi", "Bamita Empire" and "come no go" etc.<sup>20</sup>

These ethnic rivalries were aggravated when Foncha in the 1959 legislative elections in the Southern Cameroons defeated Endeley, the coastal leader of the Government party, the KNC, and replaced him as the Premier of the Southern Cameroons. The women who came out with the above song on the eve of the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1961 plebiscite knew very well that the tone of the song mattered. They were not in a friendly environment so composing songs which were intended to convince, would not have helped them. The result was that a song, which was a command in outlook, was composed. It was a marching song meaning that it was accompanied with an outright reaffirming attitude or action. They were behind their leader Foncha; they were for union with French Cameroon; and any other person must follow them. These fears were later confirmed by the *Cameroon Champion* newspaper which in 1962 published an article stating that:

The Bakweri Women's Association embracing all indigenous women of the Victoria Division of various walks of life held an extra ordinary meeting last week and at which they expressed fears of domination by elements non indigenous to the division.

They decided to make representation to His Excellency President Ahidjo and his vice Mr Foncha and other political leaders to review the political situation to make safeguards for minorities.<sup>21</sup>

### **Song 3: Vote Foncha, for Cameroon's Unity**

If Foncha has said that we should be one,  
Then it is a good thing.  
If Foncha has said that we should be one,  
Then it is a good thing.  
Come and let us unite!

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<sup>15</sup>E.M. Chilver, *Zintgraff's Exploration in the Bamenda Grassfields, Benue and Adamawa 1889-1892* (Buea: Government Printer, 1967), 5.

<sup>16</sup>J.L. Nfi, "Ethnic Tensions during the 1961 Plebiscites and Reunification in the Southern Cameroons" *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, 2012, 1-13.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Lydia Nkuhgong, retired politician, Bamenda, July 17, 2016

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Ebune "Contributions of Self-Help Associations to the Growth and Development of British Southern Cameroons 1922-1962: A Historical Perspective" *EPASA MOTO* vol 2, no. 1 (March 2004), 62.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Nfi, "Ethnic Tensions", 8.

<sup>21</sup> Beltha Enjema, "Bakweri Women's Association Express Fears", *Cameroon Champion*, Jan, 9 1962. Beltha Enjema and Liengu La Ku'u were leaders of the Muea Women's Association.

Come and let us unite!  
For when we are united,  
Then it is a good thing.<sup>22</sup>

This particular song was originally sung in the Ngemba dialects of the Bamenda central zone. The song was mainly directed to the illiterate and subaltern women who did not really know what was taking place at the time. Through the song, they were able to know that the main battle that Foncha was fighting was for them to be separated from Nigeria and be united with their brothers on the other side of the Mungo River.<sup>23</sup>

The song served like an anthem to the women each time they went on campaign rallies. Through this song, many more women of the Bamenda grasslands and the Southern Cameroons as a whole became increasingly aware of the political situation of the country. They joined hands in fighting for the liberation of the country from the domination of the Nigerians, as they joined the campaign in support of Foncha who opted for reunification with the Republic of Cameroon. Since the song was originally sung in the Ngemba dialects, the woman who intoned the song usually quoted instances of Igbo tyranny and misdemeanors in the Bamenda grassland area, thus influencing nationalist spirit in the minds of the others who answered in chorus.<sup>24</sup>

This particular song used the *Mbagalum* rhythm<sup>25</sup> which is a common rhythm among the Ngemba villages of the Bamenda Central Zone. It helped to unify the women for a common course. Unlike other traditional rhythms which were particular, the *Mbagalum* rhythm was unique in that those from different villages could easily dance to its rhythm since it was danced in all these villages, as the rhythm was the same. While women were specialized in singing and recounting their ordeal with the Nigerians in the Bamenda grassland area, men played the instruments, which consisted of drums and gongs which then gave it a special blend.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that this particular song was sung in the dialect made the subaltern women particularly concerned. They saw the fight not as Foncha's fight against Endeley, but against Nigeria. This song further heightened ethnicity in the reunification struggle, as the few coastal migrants who were found in the Bamenda grasslands were kept out of the match, as they could understand neither what was being said in the music nor accompanied the other dancers since it was purely traditional. This particular song is opposed to the first two, which were sung either in Pidgin English or in the coastal languages.

In many parts of Africa, just like in Cameroon, historical information is transmitted through songs. The fact that women spiced this song by recounting the detestable behavior of Nigerians particularly the Igbo, was history that was being transmitted from one generation to another through the medium of music. Many of the things the Nigerians did to Southern Cameroonians were recounted through songs; be it folklore music in the Southern Cameroons or in work of arts.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician , December 18, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician , December 18, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> *Mbagalum* is a North West rhythm that is played when people are jubilating as it is been danced with quicker steps.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician , December 18, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with D.A Atia retired politician July 10, 2016.



**Figure 1.** K.N.D.P. Supporters in Buea during a Campaign Rally  
**Source:** Photo Gallery, National Archives, Buea

#### **Song 4: Reception of Foncha from the U.N**

Dr. Foncha werecome (sic)  
The whole country is glad to receive you.  
The whole country is glad to see you,  
Dr. Foncha werecome (sic).<sup>28</sup>

Originally sung in the Ngemba dialect, this song was composed as a welcome song to Mr. Foncha when he returned from London in 1960. It should be noted that these village women referred to Foncha as Dr. Foncha. To some, it was just an added respect while others actually thought that since Foncha had replaced Dr. Endeley as Premier of the Southern Cameroons, he had also inherited the title of “Doctor”.<sup>29</sup> From the above songs, it can be concluded that oral folklore can be used to manipulate African politics and the Southern Cameroons on the eve of independence and reunification was no exception.

Since ethnic ties had overtaken any reasoning and compromise that would have been reached during the debate for the future of the territory, Southern Cameroonians especially those from the Bamenda grassland, saw Foncha’s insistence on the reunification option as a sign of victory over Endeley. The people of the Southern Cameroons supported Foncha’s February 1959 trip to the UN as its outcome was expected to be instrumental for the future of the territory. The KNDP women supported this trip to the UN with financial and material contribution.<sup>30</sup> In the Bamenda grasslands, for instance, each woman contributed money to the equivalent of 1000 francs CFA towards Foncha’s journey to the UN in 1959.<sup>31</sup> Apart from financial contribution for his trip to the UN, women also contributed food items, which were shared after every campaign rally.<sup>32</sup>

Women always took food items to the campaign grounds which were used to entertain all those who attended the rallies. This gesture in itself acted as a pull factor as some of those who attended the rallies did so in order to eat. Women went the extra mile of supporting other women’s associations which militated for the separation from Nigeria. According to Kah:

The women of Mbengkas for example assisted their Bu counterparts of Kelu materially (eggs, beans, groundnuts and meat) and vice versa. In all, the three Laimbwe villages made donations of groundnuts, eggs, maize and other material items which were sent to Kom to assist the struggle for independence.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician, December 18, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> It should however be noted that Foncha later in 1964 was awarded an honorary degree by the Very Rev. Edward J. Burke, President of Saint John’s University, on the Jamaica campus, Queens- New York. This was precisely on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964. (See <https://www.dibussi.com>)

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Julia Ngum retired politician and women’s coordinator, January 09, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician, December, 18, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Kah Kam, “Women Resistance in Cameroon’s Western Grassfields”, 80.

Whatever the case, some of those who belonged to this group ended up voting for the reunification option. Foncha stood for separation from Nigeria and ultimate reunification with French Cameroons which was what most of the Southern Cameroonians wanted by 1959. Women as well as men were mobilized to receive Foncha upon his return from the UN. To women, he was coming from a battle which he had fought and won so he was to be received with all the respect he deserved.<sup>34</sup>

It was against this background that the song was composed. Traditionally, it was spiced with the *njang* beatings, a royal dance. Upon his return from London in November 1960, Foncha was treated like a king. When it was sung, people in an organised manner bowed down their heads to whoever they were addressing. In the Bamenda grasslands, such respect is usually accorded only to traditional rulers. Foncha's victory in the January 1959 Legislative Elections in the Southern Cameroons in which he replaced Dr Endeley as the Premier was interpreted as a won battle. He was given all the assurances of support in the battle to secede from Nigeria through the song.<sup>35</sup>

The composition of songs on the eve of the independence and the reunification of the Southern Cameroons went beyond the subalterns. Lyrics were equally composed in praise of Foncha and the reunification option. V.E. Mukete, composed some of these lyrics. According to Mukete "composing these songs is to have a record account of past events fresh in the minds of the singer who would need to know something of the past".<sup>36</sup> Apart from the composition of songs, the Bamenda grassland women also indulged in rumour spreading as a weapon to make the reunification option popular.

The formation of pro-reunification songs was not limited to the Bamenda grassland women. In Mamfe, Kumba and Victoria, songs were composed to drive home the messages of the various political platforms. In the case of the KNDP, many of such songs were either in praise of Foncha or his political platform. Even when the reunification option succeeded in the territory, many victory songs were also formed. Some of the songs were sung throughout the Southern Cameroons while others especially those composed in the local dialects were sang within the division or town. Some of the songs composed in Kenyang include:

**Song 5: *On beh mno tang tang***

*On beh mno tang tang*

*Anfieh w'oo a wo koup*

(If you give birth to a successful child, such a child makes you proud).<sup>37</sup>

Usually, it was the paramount chief's wife who rallied other women to welcome politicians in Mamfe. Such songs were composed to hail champions of the reunification in the Mamfe Division such as DM Frambo, PM Kemcha WNO Effiom and ET Egbe.

Other songs in the Manyu land were composed as victory songs for the KNDP. This was after the proclamation of the February 1961 plebiscites results in the Southern Cameroons. The joy with which the news was received in Mamfe was reflected in the victory songs. A common song sang after the proclamation of the results in Mamfe was:

**Song 6: *Efukeyu Gbwong***

*Efukeyu gbwong*

*Banana biong*

*Efukeyu gbwong*

*Banana biong*

(Umbrella up, Banana down).<sup>38</sup>

The umbrella and the banana represented the symbols of the KNDP and the CPNC respectively. The KNDP of Foncha had as symbol, an opened umbrella with a calabash. The CPNC on its part had as symbol a banana plant besides a house. In the song, the women were saying the umbrella has triumphed (for when you open an umbrella, it goes up) while the banana plant has fallen down. The fall of the banana tree represented the defeat of the CPNC in the Mamfe country. Another song that came up after the victory of the KNDP in the Bayang country was:

**Song 7: *Foncha Win Endeley***

*Foncha win Endeley,*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Veronica Sangbong, retired politician, December 18, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Mukete, *My Odyssey: The Story of Cameroon Reunification* (Yaounde: Eagle Publishing, 2013), 476. For the reunification songs see appendix.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with John Beteck, Agbor, 2<sup>nd</sup> deputy mayor Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with John Beteck, Agbor, 2<sup>nd</sup> deputy mayor Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

*Foncha win Endeley,  
Foncha win Endeley.  
Endeley dey cut nyanga.*<sup>39</sup>

This song was popularly sung among women who supported the KNDP. To these women, Endeley was a very proud politician that even his defeat in the 1961 elections in the Southern Cameroons did not humble him. His unguarded campaign speeches turned to be his undoing in the Bayang country. Bayang women were particularly not happy with him when he said that it would take the Mamfe division twenty years to produce a son of his calibre. Mamfe it should be noted had able sons such as SA George, Dr Mengot and ET Egbe although they could not be compared to the ranks of Dr Endeley in the 1950s and early 1960s in terms of politics in the Southern Cameroons. The allegation was however received with a pinch of salt as it became a driving force to the Mamfe women to work hard to educate their children to be like Endeley or even above him. Endeley sarcasm misled him. He did not realize that politics was a game a chance and numbers, a game in which he had to dance the people's dance as long as he wanted their votes.<sup>40</sup>

In the Bafaw land, women also composed victory songs for the KNDP. Kumba was slightly different from Mamfe in that while Mamfe was dominated by KNDP politicians, Kumba had KNDP, KNC and KPP politicians. However, the KNDP that wanted independence through secession from Nigeria later on stole the show. This was because seceding from Nigeria was going to spare the Bafaw population from Igbo tyranny and domination which were very severe in Kumba just like elsewhere in the major towns of the Southern Cameroons. In Kumba after the victory of the KNDP, Bafaw women composed songs of victory. A common song sang during this period was:

**Song 8: Foncha si Sakani w'oo**

*Foncha si sakani w'oo  
Foncha bonam eh  
Ahidjo si sakani w'oo  
Ahidjo bonam eh  
(Foncha we thank you for the reunification  
Foncha welcome eh  
Ahidjo we thank you for the reunificatuion,  
Ahidjo welcome eh).*<sup>41</sup>

This was generally a welcome song when top dignitaries were coming to Kumba. Foncha and Ahidjo represented the fathers of the reunification and so the song was composed and sang to hail them. Another song sang in Kumba to venerate the reunification was:

**Song 9: We Wey We Dey for White Box**

*We wey we dey for white box,  
We win plebiscite!  
We wey we dey for white box,  
We win plebiscite!*<sup>42</sup>

This song according to Martha Mmety was taught by Mrs Fusi who was an ardent supporter of the reunification in the Bafaw land.<sup>43</sup> The white box represented the option for those who wanted to gain independence through reunification with the republic of Cameroon. As mentioned earlier, KNDP mobilization in Kumba division was not as popular as in Mamfe and even Victoria. NN Mbile the leader of the KPP was an Oroko man from the present day Ndian division.<sup>44</sup> Many Oroko people thus wanted to join Nigeria as they were very close to Nigeria.<sup>45</sup> Kumba which presented so many political options to the electorate ended up voting for reunification with the republic of Cameroon simply to avoid the Igbo menace which was so rife in Kumba.

## CONCLUSION

From the beginning, it was a question of showing how subaltern women contributed to the reunification struggle in the Southern Cameroons. Although these women were at the background, their actions contributed the success of the reunification drive in the Southern Cameroons. Their songs which in many cases were composed in the local languages

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Chief Enow Enow Samuel, retired D.O, Mile One Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Beteck John Agbor, Deputy Mayor, Mamfe, 5/8/2020.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Hannah Abwa-Mboh, housewife, Njeimbeng Kumba, 8/8/2020.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Martha Mmety, Housewife, Ebako Dibo Street, Kumba, 8/8/2020.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ndian was under Kumba division

<sup>45</sup> Interview with J.N. Abwa-Mboh, retired teacher, Njeimbeng quarter, Kumba, 8/8/2020.

helped to foster the spirit of unity among the local people who by then saw the presence of the Nigerians in the territory as undesirable. These songs that spread like wildfire united the people for a common course; the liberation of the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria domination. As noticed, J.N. Foncha who advocated for reunification with the republic of Cameroon succeeded in the 11 February 1961 plebiscite not because he was a popular politician but because a majority of the people wanted to get rid of Nigerian domination in the Southern Cameroons.

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