

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE CONFLICT IN THE NORTH-WEST AND SOUTH-WEST REGIONS OF CAMEROON: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PEACE POTENTIAL OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM AS OPPOSED TO INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION

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***Abstract:** As part of the resolution of the now almost six (6) years armed conflict in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions, the Cameroonian government set up the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (CNPBM) in January 2017. This Commission is responsible for promoting bilingualism and multiculturalism in Cameroon, with a view to maintaining peace, consolidate national unity, strengthen the will and daily practice of living together of the Cameroonian people. However, considering the promotion of bilingualism as a mission to produce an equitable number of French and English speakers on either side of Francophone and Anglophone areas obscures the motivations that underpinned the use of French and English languages during the colonial era, and whose legacy is at the origin of the claims that have provoked the Anglophone crisis since October 2016. In fact, the use of these languages aimed at imposing a way of thinking, a world vision, a culture, a lifestyle, a social and political organization. The promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism therefore appears to be an intercultural challenge. This article analyses the intercultural challenges of the CNPBM in mediating between 'Anglophone' and 'Francophone' cultures and restoring peace in the North-West and South-West Regions. In order to examine this issue, the article draws on the literature on interculturalism, specifically the theory of intercultural mediation. To this end, it uses participant observation, document analysis. This contribution brings new elements to the study of the strengthening of the bilingual and multicultural character of Cameroon and draws lessons for intercultural policies to maintain peace and consolidate national unity in Cameroon, especially within the context of the 'anglophone-francophone' dichotomy and the current 'anglophone crisis'.*

Keys words: Anglophone crisis, North-West and South-West regions, NCPBM, multiculturalism, Intercultural Mediation, living together.

INTRODUCTION

One of the decisions taken by the Cameroonian government to resolve the Anglophone crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions that started in October 2016 is the creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (CNPBM). This commission is charged, as its name indicates, with working for the promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in Cameroon, with a view to maintaining peace, consolidating unity, strengthening the will and daily practice of living together of the populations. By reducing its mission to the promotion of bilingualism (and multiculturalism) in Cameroon, the CNPBM does not take into account the interaction between the Anglophone and Francophone communities. Indeed, bilingualism, which is considered the simplest form of multiculturalism, is part of the paradigm of duality and insists on fragmentation at the expense of diversity. In Cameroon, the constitution provides for the promotion of French and English as equal languages. However, this promotion seems to be limited to the use of these two languages as a means of communication. This therefore obscures the power of language, that is, its capacity to enforce a line of thought, a worldview, a life style, a social and political organization, indeed a culture, as was the case in colonial times whose legacy is at the origin of the claims that provoked the Anglophone crisis since October 2016. Thus, the promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism appears to be a challenge of intercultural mediation between the French and English-speaking parts of Cameroon. In this article, we assume that challenges must be taken up for the efficient promotion of bilingualism in Cameroon as a conflict prevention strategy. This paper seeks to answer the following central question: What are the intercultural challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure the efficient promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism for the promotion of peace and the consolidation of national unity? The answer to this question will lead us to analyze intercultural mediation, the implications of Franco-British linguistic domination in Cameroon and finally the challenges to successful mediation between Anglophone and Francophone cultures.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW: INTERCULTURALISM VS. MULTICULTURALISM

Over the years, the management of cultural diversity has given rise to two models. These models include interculturalism and multiculturalism. Interculturalism is one of the terminological and semantic registers of interculturality: it is a political ideology whose main objective is to manage ethnocultural diversity. It also supports the development of public policies that aim at ensuring social cohesion. In this perspective, it is characterized by: the awareness of the majority/minority relationship, interactions or exchanges or intercommunity contacts. It is also characterized by: initiatives aiming at respect and tolerance for a better living together, civic responsibility for practices harmonization, integration of current cultural traditions, construction of the elements of a common culture from ethnocultural diversity, the search for a balance and resort to intercultural mediation (Bouchard, 2011a; pp. 405-425)

Intercultural mediation, which is of particular interest to this article, makes it possible to analyze the behaviour and areas of misunderstanding of national integration at the heart of an intercultural relationship. It contributes to the construction of a common knowledge, and a space for satisfactory cohabitation to both parties. This results from the confrontation of knowledge and behaviours from their respective reference framework (Foucart, 2001). It is particularly important in studies on the management of socio-cultural diversity to recognize that intercultural mediation is closely associated with relational dynamics, the process of knowledge, as well as intercultural interaction and identification for a better living together. Its importance in terms of integration is crucial and one could even say that it depends on it. Particularly implemented in situations of cultural confrontation, the process of intercultural

mediation corresponds to the « *traduction des croyances, des certitudes, des valeurs et des manières de penser propres à chaque culture* » [translation of the beliefs, certainties, values and ways of thinking specific to each culture] (Georgescu : 2014, p.18). From then on, the difference between cultures is demystified by a reconstruction of social representations, prejudices and stereotypes, as well as a revalidation of the cultures' proper characteristics and above all specific to human beings. All this leads to the creation of an inclusive collective memory.

At the epistemological level, intercultural mediation takes on the full meaning of the *intercultural* register. Indeed, it raises the issue of taking into consideration the complexity of otherness in a relationship between 'us' vs 'them'. In other words, as Cohen-Emerique states, it refers to the

« *respect des différences culturelles (de l'autre) et ses limites chez les acteurs sociaux, en termes de relations et de communication entre deux porteurs de culture pris dans un sens très large d'héritage, de mémoire, de systèmes de représentations, d'expérience de vie* » [respect of cultural differences (of the other) and its limits among social actors, in terms of relations and communication between two culture bearers taken in a very broad sense of heritage, memory, systems of representation, life experience] (2011:14-15).

In her epistemological analysis of interculturality, Abdallah-Preteille (1986) proposes three perspectives on *interculturality* including subjectivist, interactionist and situational. According to her, the subjectivist perspective has three implications. The first is the subjective and proper appropriation by individuals from different cultures of the relationship between them. The second implication is the confrontation of one culture internalized by individuals with another culture internalized by other individuals, each conveyed by individual understandings. Finally, the subjectivist perspective implies the need for action by a subject-actor towards cultural neutrality. The latter is made possible by decentering, i.e., inverting the meaning of the subject-actor relationship, in order to move from subjectivity to objectivity (Battro, 1966). The author deduces from the preceding implications that the subjectivist perspective meets a triple requirement:

1. Avoid any « *classificatrice, simplificatrice et globalisante* » [classifying, simplifying and globalizing] approach, which hinders the approach to diversity.
2. Introduce flexibility, caution and nuance into the discourse, by multiplying the perspectives and points of view and by helping to get rid of one's prejudices or other a priori, and to relativise one's models and knowledge
- 3.« *Reconnaitre que tout acte, qu'il soit de nature cognitive, relationnelle, affective, pratique ou éducative, s'inscrit dans un réseau d'intersubjectivité* » [Recognise that all actions, whether cognitive, relational, affective, practical or educational, are part of a network of intersubjectivity] (p.31), which entails, in the encounter with the other, trying to apprehend what is happening "here and now" while being aware that each person puts it in his or her own cultural reference framework.

As far as the interactionist perspective is concerned, it reveals the presence of two actors: 'I/us' vs 'other/them'. Methodologically, it focuses on the relationship between the 'I' (individual or collective) and the other. It considers difference as a dynamic relationship between two identities (Abdallah-Preteille, 1986, p.32), through which I perceive who I am through my difference with the other difference. Finally, the situational perspective goes beyond differences in norms, codes and values between people of different cultural backgrounds and looks at the social and legal statuses, as well as the historical context that

generates them (Cohen-Emerique, 2011). Indeed, in contrast to the interactionist perspective, the situational perspective discloses a sense of power relations, of an opposition between an 'us' versus 'them' leading to numerous dyads, including majority/minority, majority/minority, dominant/-dominated, developed/underdeveloped, ex-coloniser/ex-colonised, etc. Generally, these are the result of deep wounds or rekindled frustrations, stemming from mutual representations, prejudices, stereotypes or oppression and persecution in a given context.

In contrast, multiculturalism is a model of diversity management that provides for the cohabitation of diverse linguistic, cultural and ethnic groups. It is part of the paradigm of duality, i.e. it does not care about the management of confrontations and does not guarantee the contacts or interactions between these groups. All of which are not conducive to the reduction or prevention of discrimination, conflict and tension. Although multiculturalism has undergone an evolution in its conception, integrating the participation of citizens on an equal footing, regardless of their affiliation or beliefs, in an inclusive space -where differences and similarities ensure its maintenance (Modood, 2007: 7, 64 and 128).- , It is still perceived as an attempt to erase specificity, insofar as the absence of confrontation, contact or interaction between the majority and the minority promotes assimilation (White & Lomomba, 2014:93).

It is against the backdrop of the limitations of bilingualism and multiculturalism that this article analyses the Anglophone crisis in NWSW, the conception of bilingualism and multiculturalism, and assesses the challenges of the intercultural mediation model of cultural diversity management in Cameroon.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to address the key research question in this article, three sources of data were combined: observation, comparative analysis and documentary techniques. In observation, the researcher uses his or her intercultural skills (Arifon, 2010). It is then necessary to immerse oneself and integrate the observed cultures while proceeding to a decentering aiming at identifying the differences, the gaps and the detours (Julien, 1995 quoted in Arifon 2010) resulting from the interactions between them. In addition, to take a step back to analyze and produce a scientific explanation.

In this study, primary data were collected through observation and secondary data through documentary techniques. The strategy used to collect the data was to identify the socio-cultural specificities of the English and French speaking areas. Observation made it possible to identify behaviours and practices, to establish differences and to describe the actions and logic of the groups, as well as their ethno-methods and to infer some explanations.

In Cameroon, the conception and promotion of bilingualism does not take into account the fact that French and English (official languages inherited from colonization) have cultural implications at both the social and institutional levels, which are sources of conflict for the cohabitation of both peoples. In order to show that Anglophone and Francophone identities are cultural and to analyze their interactions, an inductive approach was recommended to highlight the fundamental principles of communication and intercultural mediation that can only be explained through observation. In this regards, each of the qualitative data obtained was categorized taking into account the four (04) levels of analysis of intercultural interactions referring to Cohen-Emerique's model (2011). The first level studies the cultural differences between the groups and their limits. The latter being noted through value systems, personal and/or professional norms, as well as systems of representations, manifested in built environments of the Anglophone and Francophone zones, which are identified in the form of

everyday language, visual modes of behaviour, dress, culinary habits, administrative, educational and legal practices, etc. These data are a priori visible and make it possible to describe the environment and the actions of the groups living there, as well as to discern their patterns of behaviour. However, these observations cannot explain the internal logic of the interactions, let alone the effects they induce.

In order to understand how members of a community act, one must try to recognize the attributes that determine the social position of an individual or a group in a given society, which constitutes the second and third levels of analysis. These attributes cannot be directly observed; it is necessary to infer them, either by interviewing members of society or by consulting the content of value systems, norms and social representations - rights, duties, freedoms, security, leisure, etc. - as well as socially elaborated and shared knowledge. However, this process only presents those attributes that are manifest or publicly displayed. Therefore, social status does not necessarily explain the underlying reasons for the negative effects of intercultural interactions that remain hidden or unconscious.

Thus, in order to really understand the effects of intercultural interactions, it is important to delve into the fourth level, namely the socio-historical context in which these interactions take place. This socio-historical context must necessarily be inferred because it incorporates aspects of social relations that are taken for granted and are difficult to discuss.

3. SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.1. Who is Anglophone? Who is Francophone?

The definition of the terms Francophone, and especially Anglophone in Cameroon is subject to many controversies. A first definition considers Anglophone and Francophone, Cameroonians who found themselves respectively on either side of Western and Eastern Cameroon after the Anglo-French partition of 1916. Thus, Fanso Verkijika defines an Anglophone as follows:

An Anglophone (in the Cameroon context) refers, in the first place to anyone who lived his/her colonial experience for long, in the former British Cameroon and who, as a result, was naturally exposed or become accustomed to Anglophone culture (i.e language, education, political philosophy, freedom of speech, an unnamed police, and other innumerable influence) (as cited in Abwa: 2015, p.167.)

Similarly, speaking of Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon, Willibroad Dze Ngwa says:

“Anglophones” refer to ethnic anglophone that is those Cameroonians who are ethnically rooted in the former British Southern Cameroon (present-day North West and South West provinces). They may not necessarily speak the English Language Ethnic Language. Ethnic Anglophones are different from the Cameroonians who acquired the English Language through settlement or education. The latter may be referred to as Linguistic Anglophones or Anglophiles”(as cited in ABWA: 2015, p.168)

“Francophones” refer to Cameroonians who are ethnically rooted in the former French Cameroon ...They are different from Cameroonians from the North West and South West Provinces who acquired the French Language through settlement or education and who could be referred to as Linguistic

Francophones. Ethnic francophones in Cameroon may not necessarily speak French'' (as cited in ABWA: 2015, p. 169)

In order to understand the definitions proposed by these authors, it is necessary to situate each of them in a precise perspective and to consider the context and the period from which they were elaborated. Indeed, from the perspective of the territorial domination of Cameroon by France and Great Britain, linguistic domination had cultural, historical and civilizational implications. In other words, French and English, whose imposition was aimed at « se rallier l'élite et de soumettre les pays occupés » [gaining the trust of the elite and subjugate the occupied countries] (Lorris : 2012, p.43), are bearers of a civilization, a culture from a certain period in Cameroon's history. Thus, they have influenced the way of thinking, value systems, social representations and norms of pre-existing traditional cultures, notably through lifestyle, mission, political vision and education, including the opening of schools, etc.

However, this conception of the Anglophone and the Francophone is likely to have developed, from the moment when one observed the establishment of schools of the Anglophone subsystem in the former provinces of Eastern Cameroon, and in parallel, schools of the Francophone subsystem in the former provinces of Western Cameroon. Again, from the moment that migration from the Anglophone zone to the Francophone zone and vice versa occurs. Therefore, a second definition considers an Anglophone as any Cameroonian living in East Cameroon but having studied in the Anglophone sub-system and Francophone any Cameroonian living in West Cameroon but having studied in the Francophone sub-system. And it is undoubtedly this category that Willibroad Dze Ngwa describes as *Linguistic anglophone*, and *linguistic francophone*.

We agree with Abwa (2015:125) that historically Cameroon is neither Anglophone nor Francophone, i.e. it has an identity characterized by its ethno cultural diversity, long before 1916. However, one should recognize that the Franco-British territorial and linguistic domination and the subsequent adoption of French and English as official languages have made Cameroon a bicultural state beyond the pre-existing ethnic diversity of its societies. Indeed, the linguistic culture, inherited from colonization, tends to prevail over traditional cultures. This is evidenced by the decline in the use of local languages in the home in favour of French and English for at least a decade, the decline in the transmission of some of our traditional values from parents to children, to name but a few. Furthermore, as far as traditional political organisation is concerned, Abwa himself asserts that the contact of some natives with white settlers (in the southern, central and eastern forests and much of the coast) influenced on the one hand the naming and organization of chieftaincies, and on the other hand, the thinking of traditional leaders who obeyed the instructions of their masters and adopted their prescribed style of dress (Abwa 2015: 136). In the Littoral, for example, contact with English missionaries inspired the adoption of hierarchical kingdom systems at the expense of the decentralised political structure.

This reality testifies to a certain level of acculturation of our societies to the benefit of France and Great Britain, even if only institutional cultures. Moreover, the duration of this social process of linguistic and territorial domination, from 1916 to 1960, i.e. 44 years, contributed to the construction of two identities, Anglophone and Francophone, whose poorly negotiated cohabitation has been at the origin of the escalation of the Anglophone problem into an Anglophone crisis since 2016.

3.2 Analysis of the situation

Most historians are unanimous on the origin of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. They agree that it goes back to the Fouban Conference during which was adopted the draft

federal constitution in 1961. Although the Anglophone side eventually made amendments to the draft constitution already drawn up and proposed by President Ahidjo at the time, it was surprised and did not have the opportunity to present its conception of the federation. However, the draft constitution had already been elaborated at the All Party Constitutional Conference held in Bamenda in June 1961. The resolutions modelled on the Anglo-Saxon model of governance, essentially aimed at guaranteeing the autonomy of the Anglophone part. From this area of misunderstanding, the first frustrations and differences of opinion arose. Indeed, it should be stressed that the linguistic background of the Anglophone and Francophone parts gave them different conceptions of the federation. Indeed, while the former aspired to a confederation, the latter aspired to a federation (Ngoh, 2019). Therefore, it would have been worthwhile to bring them together around a table to find a meaningful consensus to ensure the expression of each other's values and minimize the feeling of assimilation among the English-speaking minorities. This resulted in a political and socio-economic malaise among the Anglophone populations, the most explosive manifestations of which were revealed in April 1993, within the framework of the All Anglophone Conference (AACI) in Buea. The latter ended up with the Buea Declaration, in 1994 within the framework of the same Conference in Bamenda, in May 2015 with the complaints and demands of about 700 lawyers coming mainly from the NWSW regions and accusing the government of :

« ...la mise sur pied d'un programme délibéré et bien planifié en vue de faire disparaître et de remplacer les règles de procédure pénale, civile et de preuve inspirée du Common Law, par un système et une culture inspirée et copiée du droit civil français. Et [nous] rejetons fermement et sans équivoque ce processus...et [nous] exigeons la restauration des dites pratiques et procédures inspirées du Common Law » [..the setting up of a deliberate and well-planned programme to do away with and replace the Common Law rules of criminal, civil and evidentiary procedure with a system and culture inspired by and copied from French civil law. And [we] firmly and unequivocally reject this process...and [we] demand the restoration of the said Common Law inspired practices and procedures.] (as cited in NGOH, 2019 :408)

The start of the Anglophone Crisis in October 2016: Lawyers and teachers demanded a clear distinction between common law and civil law and their side-by-side progression to the National School for the Magistracy (ENAM); the non-corruption of the educational sub-system applied in the North West/South West (NWSW) regions; the creation of a law school; and the protection of the Anglophone minority (Ngoh, 2019: 408). The crisis escalated in 2016 with lawyers and teachers protests. Among other measures, the state responded by setting up the CNPBM, the creation of the common law section, and the redeployment of francophone teachers to the francophone zone.

Based on secondary data from scientific publications, as well as field data, it is possible to highlight the divergences in the conception of educational and legal cultures between Anglophones and Francophones. Indeed, consulting values, norms and codes, considered as the basis for strengthening cohesion, helps to highlight the important elements of each culture.

From the colonial era, the difference between the English and French speaking parts sounds cultural. In addition to the influence of colonial powers languages (English and French), the local populations are also influenced by their institutions and lifestyles. Indeed, as regards administration, while the policy in the Anglophone zone is based on indirect rule and leaners empowerment through primary education in the local language, and on the use of folklore resources corresponding to the learning environment (Courade, 1998: 508), in the Francophone zone, the tendency is towards assimilation. In other words, local languages are

silenced and teaching aims at inculcating in the learner a system of thought alien to his or her context of origin (Lorris, 2012 : 43).

a) The case of the Anglophone and Francophone education sub-systems

In education, while the Anglophone subsystem is flexible, decentralised and pragmatic, the Francophone subsystem is more cumbersome, bureaucratic and hyper-centralised (Courade, 1998, p.509). This reality still occurs nowadays. While a student in the A1 literary series in the Francophone subsystem has to study English, French, Literature, Philosophy, History and Geography, in addition to Latin and Greek, a student in the same series in the Art section of the Anglophone subsystem will only have to deal with French, Literature and History¹. Similarly, a student in the science series (C, D or TI) will have to add French, English, history or geography and/or civic education to his or her majors, whereas a student in the science series in the English-speaking subsystem will only have to do physics, chemistry and maths (S1) or physics, chemistry or biology (S2) etc.²

Another difference between the Anglophone and Francophone sub-systems is the organization of school time. While the teaching time is 45 minutes in the Anglophone areas, it varies between 1 and 2 hours in the Francophone areas. Furthermore, while it is true that there is a linguistic correspondence in the naming of levels (the class of 6e corresponds to the class of from 1, that of 5e to from 2, etc.) between the two sub-systems from nursery to primary school, it should be noted that the two sub-systems differ at secondary school in terms of the structuring and content of the training. Indeed, it is noted that the second cycle of secondary education comprises three classes in the Francophone zone (seconde, première, terminale) as against two classes in the Anglophone zone (Lower and Upper six)³. At the psychosocial level, Anglophone psychology favours denominational schools while French psychology favours the republican model of the secular school (Engolo: 2001). Pedagogically, teachers in the Anglophone system are trained to take pedagogical initiatives, while teachers in the Francophone system are required to apply the regulation, sometimes indiscriminately (Courade, 1998: 522). It is therefore quite plausible that the assignment of a teacher trained in the pedagogy of the francophone sub-system to an English-speaking school would pose problems for both the teacher and the learners.

At the time of reunification, the two sub-systems, which were clearly incompatible, were content to cohabit. However, between 1963 and 1972, in the dynamics of unification, Cameroonian education underwent adjustments, the objective of which was to find a bridge between the two sub-systems. This is how the bilingualism project took shape, whose educational mechanism included the creation of the bilingual high school in Buea and the integration of French language teaching in the English-speaking subsystem, while the English-speaking subsystem strengthened its identity by teaching English, mathematics and physics (Engolo: 2001, p.155). However, this strategy, let alone the 1995 Etats Généraux, did not succeed in bringing about the much-desired harmonisation of the two sub-systems. Moreover, the number of bilingual schools did not exceed 10% (Engolo: 2001, p.143).

a) Civil Law vs Common Law

In terms of law, Cameroon has also inherited two legal sub-systems, namely: the Romano-Germanic law of France and the Common Law of Great Britain. Still called civil law, Romano-Germanic law encompasses countries whose common historical basis is Roman law.

¹ See The Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The latter is a compilation of the civil law rules of Roman law made in the 6th century by Justinian. It favours written sources and therefore operates according to laws. Common law, on the other hand, is forged on case law, i.e. it operates depending on cases or matters already before the courts.

The confrontation of these two legal traditions in the translation of the Uniform Acts of the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law (OHADA) is one of the causes of the ongoing Anglophone crisis. The latter did not take into account the cultural implications of the language, especially English, with regard to the term-concept and meaning-context relationships in the Common Law. Engola and Bell Mandeng show, based on the analysis of terminological, conceptual and stylistic problems in the translation of the OHADA Uniform Acts, from an *onomasiological* and *semasiological* perspective, that the lack of intercultural and legal competence on the part of the translator is a source of a crisis of cultural representation and identity. Indeed,

La relation terme-concept est essentielle dans la gestion des identités en milieu interculturel. Puisque les communautés revendiquent un ancrage sémantique particulier, elles orientent souvent leur mode de perception-action autour de référents antinomiques. Le terme fonctionne comme un voile qui épouse les formes du concept. Le concept obéit aux contingences du temps et du lieu sémantique. Ainsi, le conservatisme terminologique et la fixité conceptuelle en zone interculturelle ne militent pas en faveur d'une médiation culturelle. La réinvention littéraire conçue par l'ajustement de la relation terme-concept aux exigences du lieu sémantique est un moyen de rencontre interculturelle. La localisation et l'adaptation conceptuelle devraient être utilisées dans la traduction des Actes uniformes de l'OHADA pour concevoir des matérialités symboliques produites par la créativité du traducteur. [unofficial English translation: The term-concept relationship is essential in the management of identities in intercultural settings. Since communities claim a particular semantic anchorage, they often orient their mode of perception-action around antinomic referents. The term functions as a veil that hugs the forms of the concept. The concept obeys the contingencies of time and semantic place. Thus, terminological conservatism and conceptual fixity in the intercultural zone are not conducive to cultural mediation. Literary reinvention through the adjustment of the term-concept relationship to the requirements of the semantic location is a means of intercultural encounter. Localization and conceptual adaptation should be used in the translation of the OHADA Uniform Acts to design symbolic materialities produced by the translator's creativity.] (Engola & Mandeng : 2020)

From the above perspective, it is important to evaluate the mission of the CNPBM in managing the promotion of bilingualism in Cameroon, particularly between the two regions.

4. MANAGEMENT OF BILINGUALISM IN CAMEROON, FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY: THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROMOTION OF BILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM (CNPBM)

It is somewhat premature to evaluate the work of the CNPBM in the management of cultural and linguistic differences in Cameroon, for peace and unity, given its recent creation. However, a feedback on the actions taken by the government since unification in May 1972 to promote bilingualism in Cameroon, as well as an analysis of the missions of the CNPBM, would enable a better orientation of its prerogatives.

In Cameroon, bilingualism is an institutional requirement. Indeed, the constitution provides that English and French are official languages of equal value. In addition, since unification in

May 1972, the government has done everything possible to ensure a balance between the two languages, notably with the creation of the Advanced School for Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) in Buea in 1980. At the same time, the "Operation Bilingualism" project was implemented.

The objective of the Advanced School for Translation and Interpreting (ASTI) is to train translators and interpreters for integration into the civil service. In 1999, this objective was compromised by the systematic discontinuation of the integration of translators and interpreters into the public administration (Mal Mazou: 2015). As a result, the new crop of translators and interpreters is mainly oriented towards the international market and training in translation and/or interpretation is no longer a requirement for the recruitment of translators and interpreters in the translation units of public services. This situation has contributed to limiting bilingualism to a linguistic perspective without consideration of cultural aspects. The special recruitment of 500 translation and interpretation professionals ordered by the Head of State in November 2019 will rectify the situation. This will last over five (5) years at a rate of 100 recruitments per year. Operation Bilingualism is an initiative of the French cooperation, the objective of which was to train teachers, especially English-speaking ones, locally and abroad in French and in the teaching of French as a foreign language (FLE) (Engolo, 2001). A divergence in the reading of the education system in relation to the British promoters will generate particular social relationships and will not allow the double British cooperation to be taken advantage of.

The CNPBM has as mission, to ensure the maintenance of peace, consolidate the national unity of the country and strengthen the will and daily practice of living together of its populations through the following missions:

1. Submit reports and opinions to the President of the Republic and to the Government on matters relating to the protection and promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism;
2. Monitor the implementation of the provisions making English and French two official languages of equal value, in particular their use in all public services, semi-public bodies as well as in any body receiving State subsidies;
3. Conduct any study or investigation and propose any measures to strengthen the bilingual and multicultural character of Cameroon;
4. Elaborate and submit to the President of the Republic draft texts on bilingualism, multiculturalism and living together
5. Popularise the regulations on bilingualism, multiculturalism and living together
6. Receive any request denouncing discrimination based on the disrespect of constitutional provisions relating to Bilingualism and Multiculturalism and report to the President of the Republic
7. Carry out any other mission entrusted to it by the President of the Republic, including mediation missions

From 14 to 18 March 2022, *Mission 2* took the form of a second field visit to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of the national official languages policy in 35-targeted companies. According to Law No. 2019/019 of 24 December 2019 on the promotion of official languages in Cameroon, in its article 7, bilingualism in Cameroon is the current practice of the two official languages by the citizens. This conception of

bilingualism does not give any orientation as regards the type of bilingualism to be promoted. Is the bilingualism that the State of Cameroon wishes to promote linguistic? cultural? or psychosocial? The provisions of the above-mentioned law suggest that it is linguistic bilingualism, that is, as bilingualism that limits to the use of French and English as means of communication.

5. CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION FOR PEACE AND UNITY IN CAMEROON

In order to achieve a satisfactory mediation between the Francophone and Anglophone institutional cultures, the question should no longer be which of the cooperative links (French or Great Britain); rather, it is a matter of laying the groundwork for constructing and defining the criteria of a Cameroonian national identity. Of course, the latter should be the result of the intermingling of the different cultures existing on the national territory. In fact, this action must lead to the triggering of a process of intercultural mediation with a view to removing ambiguities, overcoming prejudices and stereotypes (e.g hate speech such as *les anglofou* used by 'Francophones' to refer to 'Anglophones' as fouls or again, *frogs/pigs* used by 'anglophones' to refer to their Francophones brothers). And finding a common ground for living together. In other words, it is about :

- Agreeing to change the model for managing diversity, and thus redefining the concepts of bilingualism and multiculturalism
- Develop public policies that promote the development of horizontal bilingualism, i.e. bilingualism that gives equal status to official languages in texts and in practice both in linguistic and cultural perspective
- Encourage harmonisation practices in the field of education, law, administration or any other field with cultural disparities
- Make intercultural mediation (rather than multiculturalism) the preferred tool for intercultural contacts and interaction
- Enhance the value of and make the best use of translators profession and their cultural mediation skills profession in Cameroon
- Provide a legal framework for the profession of translator
- Reconsider the stakes of Franco-British cooperation and draw from it a common cultural anchorage for social cohesion and living together

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to analyze the challenges facing the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism in ensuring intercultural mediation between the Anglophone and Francophone regions of Cameroon, and thus restoring peace in the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. In order to achieve this, the concept of interculturalism was explored in all its registers and the role of intercultural mediation, as a model for the management of ethnocultural diversity was analyzed. Afterwards, a socio-historical analysis of the Cameroonian context, with regard to the educational and legal systems, made it possible to analyse the language-culture link, and identified the origin of the divergences in the perception and conception of institutions both on the Anglophone and Francophone sides, as well as the reasons that do not favour an harmonization of these perceptions and conceptions, for a better living together. Finally, we

defined required conditions required for the adoption and efficient implementation of the interculturalism model for the management of cultural diversity in Cameroon, particularly in the context of the Anglophone -Francophone dichotomy. As a result, for a better cohabitation of the so-called 'Anglophones' and 'Francophones' in Cameroon, interculturalism is a key asset for it highlights misunderstanding and helps build a common life environment for peaceful co-existence. .

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