

CAMEROON DIASPORA AND THE AMBIGUITY OF DUAL NATIONALITY/CITIZENSHIP IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

There is increase attention in scientific literature on the relationship between governments and their diasporas. This relationship is characterized by the response given to diasporic needs such as the right to vote in their countries of origin, dual nationality and governance in general. Cameroon is no exception. The nationality law in Cameroon however does not provide for dual nationality and/or citizenship. This poses a real challenge and dilemma to the diasporic community between retaining Cameroonian nationality while in foreign land with the need to be able to enjoy the advantages offered to their citizens. The second challenge stems from the fact that the nationality law although it does not provide for dual nationality, some nationals and/or members of the diaspora can be seen possessing foreign passports while still recognized as Cameroonian citizens. These “dual nationals” are sometimes officials, sporters or even identified from their political affiliations. This poses a real problem of ambiguity in the application of the nationality law. Such ambiguity and subjectivity despite the law is often decried by the Cameroonian diaspora who suggests several measures such as the amendment of this law to embrace dual nationality for every citizen, or a strict application of this law, thereby promoting impartiality and equality in rights and obligations.

Key words: *Cameroonian diaspora, nationality, dual nationality.*

Introduction

Nationality refers to the membership and subjection to State law and power, citizenship refers to the notion of collective self-determination, the freedoms, and rights guaranteed by membership in a political community. Dual citizenship or dual nationality refers to an individual being a citizen of two countries or a legal status by which a person becomes a citizen of two countries. Dual citizens have two passports which essentially makes them live and travel freely within their native and naturalized countries without immigration constraints.

Until recently, dual citizenship was a marginal issue which primarily concerned Cameroonian athletes (particularly professional footballers) in Europe. However, today, as a result of the activities and establishment of vibrant and ever-growing Cameroonian Diaspora communities around the world (particularly in Europe and America) and the equally growing number of children of Cameroonian parentage born in these foreign countries, the issue of dual citizenship has become a critical one – even though it is yet to become part

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of the national discourse back in Cameroon (Tande, 2022). In fact, in the rare occasions when the issue of citizenship has made the headlines in Cameroon, it has been in the context of the fraudulent acquisition of Cameroonian citizenship by foreigners; a situation which according to the Government daily (CameroonTribune, 2002), may result in “a person of doubtful nationality could someday become the Prime Minister of Cameroon as was said to be the case elsewhere”.

Legal Framework on nationality in Cameroon

The legal framework on nationality is enshrined in Law No. 1968-LF-3 of 11th June 1968 to set up the Cameroon Nationality Code often cited as Law No.68-DF-3. This law of 1968 defines the principles and conditions under which Cameroonian nationality is acquired, retained, or lost. Although it does not define the term citizenship, it makes illusion to the traits and characteristics of citizenship. This explains why in this article; it will be regarded as nationality.

Acquisition of Nationality

Sections 2 and 3 define the general provisions for acquiring Cameroonian nationality *de facto* by birth and how it can be lost by law or a public authority under the law. Section 5 of the law also stipulates how Cameroonian nationality is extended to unmarried minor children below the age of 21 under the person concerned. Chapter 2 of the law defines modalities under which nationality is bestowed from origin. Thus, under nationality of origin, we can identify nationality by descent and by birth.

By nationality of origin as covered in Chapter II, it refers to the easiest means through which by birth or by descent, a child is born by both parents, both of whom are Cameroonian nationals. This also applies to a child born legitimately to at least one parent of Cameroonian nationality. He or she is also eligible to claim Cameroonian nationality if desired. However, for a child that was born illegitimately, his/ her cameroonian nationality can only be obtained if the parent to whom the connection is first established is a Cameroonian national. This can also be possible in the case whereby the first established parent has no or unknown nationality, but the second-established parent has Cameroon nationality. A legitimate child also born in Cameroon is eligible for nationality when at least one of the child’s parents, even of foreign nationalities, was also born in Cameroon, while an illegitimate child can also claim Cameroon nationality only if the first-established, foreign nationals were born in Cameroon. The law also makes provision in this chapter for children born on Cameroonian soil with the exception of those born from diplomatic and consular mission staff that are foreigners. This chapter further explains how nationality can be attributed to a child born in Cameroon if it is established that they are unable to claim any other nationality. This provides the first step of conditionalities to possessing Cameroonian nationality according to the law.

The second method in acquiring nationality can be through marriage. This is contained in Chapter 3a sections 17-19. This type of nationality can be

obtained when a foreign woman marries a Cameroonian national. She may expressly request to acquire Cameroonian nationality at the time of celebration of the marriage. This also applies in the case of a marriage, whereby a woman whose national law permits her to retain her nationality of origin may declare at the time of celebration of the marriage and in the form prescribed by law, signs before the judge or president of the Civil Court at the chief town of the sub-division in which she resides, that she declines the Cameroonian nationality even while residing in Cameroon. This therefore implies that the court or the law in Cameroon where the foreigner intends to get married to a Cameroonian woman gives her the possibility to retain her nationality of origin or acquire that of the state in which she is getting married. It is normal that a woman once married, automatically retains the name of her husband and any child born in the course of this marriage obtains the nationality of the father. This implies that a Cameroonian woman may decide to retain her nationality at birth or may in turn become a national of the country in which the marriage is celebrated or that of her husband.

Nationality can also be obtained by naturalisation. The law also makes provision for this form of acquisition of nationality in Chapter II. This section explains that Cameroon nationality may be acquired by foreign citizens who have met the minimum residency requirements within Cameroon and are judged to meet character and health standards and whose main interest are based in Cameroon. This acquisition is however subjective and provided by government decree and as such is ultimately subject to government approval. The process may be simplified for foreign nationals that have married a Cameroon national woman, and were born in Cameroon, have rendered exceptional services to Cameroon or whose naturalisation would be highly advantageous for the state. Similarly, children born in Cameroon by foreign parents or adopted by Cameroon parents may adopt Cameroon nationality at majority if residency requirements are met.

Loss and Forfeiture of Cameroonian nationality

Cameroonian nationality like all other nationalities can be forfeited and/or lost. The law on nationality makes provision for circumstances under which this is possible under Chapter IV. There are three main ways someone can lose or forfeit a Cameroonian nationality: acquisition of a foreign nationality, voluntary renunciation and by government decree.

By acquisition of a foreign nationality, an individual who resides in Cameroon and willingly acquires the citizenship of another country or state automatically loses the Cameroon nationality. This is also true for any Cameroonian immigrant or member of the diaspora who becomes a naturalised citizen of a foreign state. He or she according to the 1968 law on nationality in Section 21, automatically loses its Cameroonian nationality. Moreover, children of parents of different nationalities amongst which a Cameroonian are asked to choose a given nationality on attaining the age of majority which is 21. The law

in Cameroon does not allow an individual to retain more than one nationality. Reunification of Cameroonian nationality is seen in a situation whereby the nationality law also gives the possibility to individual residing in Cameroon to renounce his or her nationality. The law makes explicit mention of the renunciation of nationality where a Cameroonian woman and national gets married to a foreigner, such a person can renounce his or her Cameroon citizenship to acquire the foreign one upon marriage (Section 32). This form of loss of nationality by the Cameroon woman also depends on the provisions of the nationality law of the country of her husband.

Nationality can also be lost by government decree. In this case a Cameroonian may lose his or her Cameroonian nationality if he or she insist and continues to work in a public service of an international organisation or foreign body despite an order by the Cameroonian government to resign from it as contained in Section 31c. Such a decree can also be made for Cameroonian nationals who have gained their nationality through marriage or naturalisation within the previous 10 years. In this case the government may revoke their nationality by decree, especially if the individual in question convicted of an act defined as a criminal act or an offence against the internal or external security of the State as seen in Section 34 (1968-LF-3, 2023).

Dual Nationality and citizenship: a major concern of Cameroonian diaspora

The issue of dual nationality has become a major concern for Cameroonian diaspora when examining the meaning of dual nationality/citizenship and the rights and obligations that go with holding a Cameroonian nationality and the constraints faced by Cameroonians abroad who desire to naturalise in their countries of residence while keeping their Cameroonian nationality.

Understanding dual nationality/citizenship

David Leblang defines National citizenship as connoting a set of exclusive rights and responsibilities that apply to members of a country's political community; a community that is generally defined by a nation's borders (Leblang, 2013). Citizens of a country often have the right to own property, are eligible for employment, and entitled to public education, and other social programs and, in democracies, are often vested with the right to vote. With these rights come obligations including, but not limited, taxation and, in some cases, compulsory military service. Citizenship is, thus, a political construction with implications for social and economic life.

Dual nationality, also referred to as multiple nationalities, is the legal status held by a person simultaneously in two or more States (Nguindip, 2017). It can be acquired at birth in connection with naturalisation of immigrants in their country of residence or with the re-acquisition of nationality by expatriates or ethnic minorities in their homeland. Dual citizenship is

sometimes incorrectly used synonymously with dual or multiple nationalities. Thus the term multiple nationalities refer only to the legal status in several States and does not specify the rights and obligations a person holds vis-à-vis the state of second or third nationality where the person does not currently reside. Multiple citizenships, or dual citizenship, were, for a long time, seen as a problem by states; security risks, dual voting rights, consular issues, and lack of loyalty were among the issues discussed. It was generally argued that dual citizenship might compromise one's allegiance to the state. International and regional conventions on citizenship reflected this concern. However, the stance towards multiple citizenships has, at least partly, shifted during recent decades, and the Council of Europe convention concerning nationality from 1997 is neutral on the issue.

Having dual citizenship allows an individual to possess political and economic rights in multiple countries; it often presents the citizen with the ability to enter the workforce and to exercise political rights. From the perspective of an immigrant, dual citizenship is advantageous as it eliminates the need to obtain a visa to return home and allows the expatriate an opportunity to purchase property and make investments in her homeland. More importantly, it involves the introduction of systems to allow citizens to experience a growing number of such rights without returning home. The expansion of voting has been most widely studied. It is now the case that the large majority of countries have systems in place to allow their citizens to participate in national elections. Other rights that may be exercised from overseas include social protection, such as the receipt of pensions or welfare benefits outside the country. Investment opportunities, certain occupations, or rights to own property are frequently restricted to citizens yet can be extended to operate externally as well.

The international norm of the 19th and 20th centuries held that individuals would denounce home country citizenship rights before naturalizing in another country as holding multiple citizenships was seen as a moral failing. The rationale behind the abhorrence of dual citizenship prior in the 19th and early 20th century as explained by Koslowski was that, it was consistent with the realpolitik view of international politics: dual citizenship was rejected because it blurred the lines of diplomatic protection and military obligation (Koslowski 2003); it potentially decreased the incentive for assimilation and participation in the host country (Renshon 2005), and it was thought to promote "disloyalty and deceit, divided allegiances and torn psyches (Spiro 2002). The dislike for dual citizenship finds expression in how countries treat their expatriate populations, often referring to them as "traitors" who have turned their backs on their countrymen. Countries treated their expatriates "as prodigal sons and daughters who had abandoned their national family and who therefore should not be allowed to retain the original nationality" (Martin 2003).

For Faist, by granting diaspora members legal status, through such things as dual citizenship and the right to vote, governments can strengthen the nation-diaspora connection by building symbolic nationalism and engaging diaspora members in transnational activities (Faist, 2002).

Constraints of “single” nationality/citizenship for Cameroonian diaspora

The negative implications of restricting Cameroonian nationals from acquiring and retaining foreign nationality extend a broad and deep set of predicaments which take form across a spectrum of scales stretching from personal, family trauma to macroeconomic trends of the country. This phenomenon of dual nationality has caused Cameroonian immigrants in foreign countries, but who do not want to lose the native nationality, to be limited by their inability to adopt a second nationality. Also, Cameroonian immigrants to foreign countries who embrace the benefit of taking their adopted home's nationality are reticent in their ability to return to Cameroon with the skill and prosperity they have accumulated while abroad due to the loss of their original Cameroonian nationality. The complications from prohibiting dual nationality in Cameroon vary from the legal, economic, political and even social.

The legal complications of prohibiting dual nationality in Cameroon are amongst the most explicit consequences and the most primary act in which most Cameroonians considered it as most severe but also more nebulous detriment. This can be seen from the various problems that can be faced when applying the principle. For instance, limitations on Cameroonian immigrants who choose not to become naturalised citizens of their destination country will be addressed with regards to the effect those restrictions have on hindering economic and educational success in the destination country. Similarly, the legal complications that forfeiting Cameroonian nationality has on voting and domestic property holding has acted as a dilemma to many Cameroonians who intend acquiring dual nationality. When the country discovered that a Cameroonian is in possession of dual nationality, such a person loses all participatory political rights stipulated in our legal texts as everyone having that right to vote being a fundamental and citizenship obligations (Nguindip, 2017).

Economically, obtaining naturalised citizenship in a destination country can enable or speed the ability to support immigration of family member to share in the enhanced of economic opportunities. In their countries of residence, Cameroonians usually have to take pragmatic, severe and even unavoidable steps in order to forfeit their original Cameroonian nationality. Thus sending money to their loved ones back home only in the detriment of forfeiting their original nationality is really a painful element to Cameroonians living in these countries. This is even more sad when they must change their nationality of origin in order to have some financial gains so as to help their families back at home, and once they do this, they forfeit their Cameroonian

nationality. Cameroonian immigrants to developed countries who wish to keep their native nationality are placed at a strategic disadvantage in their destination nations' economies. This disadvantage can translate directly to hinder ability to succeed professionally, meaning that Cameroonian immigrants who assume the nationality of their destination country face significantly increased difficulties in reinvesting their foreign economic gains into the Cameroonian economy.

Though foreign property ownership is technically recognised in Cameroon, the dysfunctional judiciary and administration which handle property matters make such investment precarious. Many Cameroonians abroad who have adopted the nationality of their destination country have been reported to have significantly faced difficulties in reinvesting their foreign economic gains into the Cameroonian economy. This difficulty still persists although, foreign property ownership is technically recognised in Cameroon, as a result of some dysfunctions in the judiciary and administration handling property matters, this making such investment precarious.

Socially, the prohibition of dual nationality to Cameroonian diaspora often limits the ability of native Cameroonians to acquire very high quality of education, while this may discourage the return to the country for those who drop Cameroonian nationality in the course of acquiring a foreign nationality. This results in a brain drain that of some category of professionals. Similarly, the need for immigrants to choose between their native Cameroon and the potential prosperity of their destination country can create misperceptions of having forsaken their homeland and generate a division of isolation despite deep and continue feelings of loyalty.

The political constraints of the ban of dual nationality resides in the fact that a naturalised Cameroonian in the country of destination losses all participatory political privileges, most especially and specifically, the right to vote. This is even more evident with the law of 2011 on the right to vote for Cameroonians abroad. This is a huge concern for this diaspora that esteem that political apathy runs rampant and the validity of elections is routinely questionable. Such a sacrifice may appear minor to anyone contemplating naturalisation. As explained by Nguindip this becomes more complicated when the immigrants discovered that denouncing Cameroonian nationality and maintaining that of destination will be more economical and advantageous to him, he or she will have no option of denouncing its Cameroonian nationality (Nguindip, 2017). This aspect of the nationality law has cause lots of controversies when it comes to the democratic participation of the activities of the country. As a result, some Cameroonian expatriates would not be able to influence items with potentially far greater immediate impact to their lives, such as the tax rates, local administration, transportation plans, education policies and a host of other matters settled by, or at least subject to, the ballot box of their destination country.

Dual nationality: Legality against practice with Cameroonian diaspora

The issue of prohibition of dual nationality as stipulated by the 1968 nationality law as argued by Cameroonians abroad would have been less ambiguous and subjective if there weren't "dual nationals" with Cameroonian nationality. This explains the different advocacy strategies that have been developed by this diaspora over the years to draw the government's attention on the need to either revise the existing law to meet up with global trends on nationality that allow for dual nationality. In the case where this is impossible, most arguments are for an impartial application of the law.

Dual nationals with Cameroonian nationality

A respondent on expressing what he termed the "political instrumentalization of the 1968 nationality law" gave the example of how after Cameroon won the first Afro-Asian football finals against Saudi Arabia in Jeddah in 1985, the Saudis refused to hand over the trophy on grounds that Cameroon had fielded an ineligible French player during the first leg encounter in Yaoundé. The player in question was none other than the legendary Roger Milla who had showed up for the game with his French passport. The Cameroonian government insisted that even though Roger Milla carried a French passport he was still a bona fide Cameroonian citizen who had the right, in fact the obligation, to defend the colours of his native land. The issue was resolved months later following high-level diplomatic exchanges and the mediation of the world football governing body, FIFA. About a decade later, the same Cameroonian Government barred another Cameroonian icon, the irascible novelist and critic Mongo Beti, from running for the 1997 parliamentary elections on grounds that he was not a Cameroonian. When Mongo Beti returned from exile a few years earlier, he had entered the country using a French passport. Until his death a few years later, the Biya regime continued to describe Mongo Beti as a foreigner who was ceaselessly meddling in the affairs of his host country Cameroon.

From the case of Roger Milla and Mongo Beti, the members of this diaspora are of the opinion that the 1968 nationality law is generally enforced only when it is in the interest of the regime in power to do so. From this example, they explain that the only reason Mongo Beti was consistently branded a foreigner and barred from contesting parliamentary elections was because he was a virulent critic of President Biya and his regime. Mongo Beti's treatment was quite different from that of Professor Hogbe Nlend, another prominent Cameroonian who had sought exile in France during the Ahidjo era. Hogbe Nlend, who later became the President of the influential Bordeaux chapter of the ruling CPDM party in the late eighties and early nineties, was eventually appointed a minister in Biya's cabinet in 1999 on the UPC ticket even though he carried a French passport just like Mungo Beti. These three incidents involving passports from the same foreign country to him, clearly capture the "schizophrenic and arbitrary application" of Cameroon's outdated and highly

restrictive nationality law (Loi no. 68-LF du Juin 1968 portant Code de la nationalité) which is out of step not only with the reality of Cameroonian society today, but also with current world-wide trends.

Other examples that can be cited in this article will be those usually cited by some members of the diaspora of ministers within the government that are holders of more than one passport including that of Cameroon. These citizens have been seen to have more than one nationality enabling them to travel to other countries with ease and even carry out investments in such countries. This is often decried by Cameroonian migrants who esteem that the application of the nationality law is very subjective, instrumentalised and outdated given globalisation trends in today's modern world.

Diaspora advocacy efforts for revision of nationality law

From the diverse groups such as: "Cercle Felix Moumie" in Belgium, the "Dermokratisches Netzwerk fur Kamerun" in Germany, the "Front pour l'Evolution et la Republique" in Belgium amongst others, they all mobilized in 2005 to create the CODE (Collective of Democratic Organizations of the Cameroonian Diaspora). In her original form, CODE also regroups representatives of opposition political parties and exiled opposition leaders that continued to express their rejection of the regime despite the distance with homeland (Moise Yanou Tchingangong, 2017). Mobilizations in transit towns or during the trips of the President of the Republic as well as commemorative days of the ruling party, testify of their determination to make their dissatisfaction more and more visible. The activism for the amendment of the 1968 nationality law by the Cameroonian diasporic community has been carried out through the use of several approaches ranging from peaceful meetings to violent protests.

The use of pacific methods for advocacy and lobbying is evident in the meetings between the Cameroonian diaspora resident in Europe and other parts of the world, and some government officials during official visits and meetings. A vivid example is during the visit of President Paul Biya on the 5th of February 2013 at the Le Meurice Hotel in Paris. During this meeting, the representatives of the diaspora thanked the Head of State for having permitted them to participate in the presidential elections of 9th October 2011, and their wish to have a dual nationality (CamerounTribune, 6th February 2013). The request for an update of legislation on nationality in Cameroon to allow for dual nationality has been a constant fight of the diaspora.

This is evident in the multiple meetings between the Cameroon diasporas, her representatives /organisations and many officials of the Cameroon government during their visits/missions abroad. Such rare occasions for example are perceived when during a visit to the United States in 2001, former Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge conceded in a press conference in Chicago that the issue of dual citizenship was an important one and intimated that Cameroon may eventually have to follow the trend towards dual citizenship if it intended to fully exploit resources and skills of its ever-

growing Diaspora community. Dr. Elvis Ngole Ngole, a prominent member of the Musonge delegation, even advised the Cameroonian Diaspora in the United States to mobilize its resources and energetically lobby lawmakers back home in view of amending the 1968 Citizenship law. However, when Musonge's successor, Ephraim Inoni, visited the United States four years later, he simply brushed aside the issue of dual citizenship, insisting that Cameroonian law was very clear on the matter, and that change was not in the horizon. According to respondents from this specific diaspora, they consider that the fact that most Cameroonians living in Europe especially and the USA are considered opponents of the regime, and that the dissonant calls for dual citizenship legislation have been coupled with demands for Diaspora voting rights has not helped matters. It has inadvertently created an emotionally-charged and partisan environment where a reasoned and informed debate on the issue has become virtually impossible since many in the regime consider the granting of dual citizenship rights to the Cameroon Diaspora as an unnecessary and reckless reward for the very people who are trying to bring down the regime in power.

The issue of dual nationality was also brought up during consultations held by the Prime Minister Chief Dr Dion Ngute in prelude of the national dialogue held in 2019 as a means of finding solutions to the ongoing anglophone crisis. One of the main actors in these consultations was the diaspora represented by some of her organisations such as the Cameroon Council for the Diaspora. The aim of this consultation was to understand the grievances of the diaspora and also assess their contribution in finding lasting solutions to the anglophone crisis.

Another pacific method worth noting in this article is that of increase in the peaceful protests that have been witnessed in the different cities in Europe and the USA with many grievances amongst which the denial of dual nationality of Cameroonians abroad who have adopted another nationality. In several studies carried out amongst the different diaspora to understand why these protests were usually organised out of Cameroon, respondents explained that peaceful manifestations are usually declared but not authorized when they do not align with the ideologies of the ruling party or do not serve their agendas. Therefore, forceful "unauthorized" manifestations are usually sanctioned on claims of terrorism following the 2014 law on terrorism (Mukete, 2023). The members of this diaspora therefore insisted based on their explanations that, although these laws exist, their applications are not guaranteed and the rights provided by these laws are not "secured". This therefore serves as a reason for their activities to decry the non-application as well as the intricacies in the application of these laws on one hand, and the guarantee of these rights in the European cities under this study provides an enabling environment for their activities and a leitmotiv thereof on the other hand. (CRTV), C. R. (2019).

Picture n° 1: Authorized protest against the Cameroonian Government in Paris



Source: Mimi Mefo.Infos 2018

Members of Cameroonian diaspora sometimes resort to other approaches for government's attention. These methods used by the diaspora apart from pacific protests and meetings include but not limited to social media, violent manifestations etc.

The use of social media by the diaspora for mobilisation of sympathisers has known an exponential growth since the era of globalisation and the bloom of ICTs. In this regard, we can cite the creation of social media platforms by some members of the diaspora and their movements for example the BAS, CODE and CDD. Some popular accounts of diasporic organisations such as BAS, Bobbi Tanap or even of some individuals like Valsero and Wilfred Ekanga can be mentioned. These accounts are justified by her content creators as meant to create awareness on some "ills" like the holding of passport for other countries and of Cameroon by some members of government, illegal arrest and detention of opposition party militants, rampant embezzlement of public funds, significant increase in corruption and mismanagement, poor state of health and educational infrastructures, increased in the prices of basic commodities without a corresponding increase in the purchasing power of Cameroonian, the prolonged and unresolved Anglophone crisis orchestrating more than Five thousands deaths and with more than seven thousands internally displaced persons etc. This has led to the increase in the creation of social media accounts by other diasporic movements and organisations in Cameroon that are pro-government. The aim in the multiplication of these accounts and the increase in their activity is in order to counteract the activities and propaganda by the specific diaspora, whose ideas and discourse

are often considered by the government as “unpatriotic” and against values promoted by the constitution of Cameroon. In summary, they agreed that today, with the help of technology, new economies, dominated by information and communication technology have created opportunities for previously suppressed voices like theirs to emerge. These technologies of persuasion and dissemination in the public sphere have helped this specific diaspora and others in that, it has been beneficial for Anglophone Cameroonians to popularize their claims on the Internet.

They further support that though silenced within Cameroon; diasporic voices critical of the government can still be heard virtually on the Internet. An example can be seen through the creation of some Youtube channels, creation of facebook accounts with live sessions on trending news in Cameroon, organised events/activities among others. There is no doubt that social media is a powerful tool and has shaped the way the government and the specific diaspora have communicated in recent times. An example is seen below in the use of Facebook by the specific diaspora to attract sympathisers and mobilise the public opinion on facebook around one of her causes.

Cameroon Stop Repression

*La diaspora Camerounaise qui a manifesté le samedi 17 juillet à Genève n'a pas manqué de rendre un hommage aux prisonniers politiques, injustement incarcérés dans les prisons du régime de M. Biya. À *TAGNE Jean Singhor*, ici sur le t-shirt de cette manifestante, nous pensons très fort à toi, ainsi qu'aux autres.*
Source : <https://cameroonstoprepression.org/les-prisonniers/>, Facebook 2022

The use of violent manifestations is an approach that has been used by the diaspora to state their claim for dual nationality for Cameroonian immigrants that had acquired a foreign citizenship and still desired to keep their Cameroonian nationality. These violent manifestations have increased in the last decade in some towns especially Berlin, Paris, Geneva and New York. The justification provided by the diaspora responsible for these protests that are sometimes violent lies in the reaction or feedback they have gotten from the state after other methods have been used. For example, in an online news article report by “The Africa Report”, it recounts that in 2020 following the protests of the diaspora in some cities in Europe especially Berlin and Paris, the President of the Republic referred to the protests in his traditional 31 December speech, criticising the “excessive behaviour of some compatriots in the diaspora” and questioning “whether they are or are no longer Cameroonians”.

“I think they should, out of patriotism, refrain from negative comments about their country of origin,” he said. “One should always respect one’s homeland, its institutions and those who embody them.” President Paul Biya (Dougeli, 2020)

However, this attempt to sound reasonable is unlikely to smooth relations with his critics in the diaspora. Some interviewed respondents explain that by distinguishing between those who are Cameroonian and those who are

no longer Cameroonian, he is, in effect, creating a category of second-class citizens. While Cameroon does not recognise dual nationality, those who have acquired a new one and have therefore in principle lost or renounced their original one, with all the rights attached to it, are nonetheless subject, according to the President, to the obligation to be patriotic. Otherwise formulated, « they have no rights, only duties ». Another explanation recounted in this study was the quote from a respondent in these terms; *“How can one demand a love of country from people whose exclusion was planned by national laws? Men and women who are both ineligible and banned from voting but also subject to visa requirements to go on holiday or visit their families in their home countries?”*. They further explain that they will never accept a shadowy nationalism that questions the loyalty of the diaspora and treats it as the “eleventh region” of the country or the “fifth column”, as the case may be.

Some of the respondents interviewed have also used terms like “pseudo-patriots” to refer to the members of this specific diasporic movements. In a reaction to the call for boycott to Ben Decca’s concert, the journalist Paul Mahel referred to the BAS in the following words *“I was sad to read Ben Decca’s very classy press release, announcing the cancellation of his show in Germany ..., in the face of the threat of some pseudo patriots”* (Mahel, 2023).

Conclusion

Cameroon like every other country has a right to a nationality law based on her interests, specificities, aspirations and prospects. However, the issue of dual nationality amongst other concerns of the diaspora cannot be ignored. This is because, in order to achieve the SDGs or the NDS30, the government needs all her citizens. Furthermore, the update of the nationality law does not demonstrate the will of the government to build an inclusive Cameroonian society but also to improve her relations with the diaspora.

With the rise in demonstrations against the government of Cameroon by the diaspora it becomes evident that there is a high need for the government to either establish dual nationality, as many countries on the continent have done, which has a more respectful and rewarding approach to the diaspora. This measure would have the advantage of removing obstacles to mobility and would make it possible to reap the economic and emotional benefits of openness. It could also maintain this retrograde and counterproductive arrangement, which is concerned with excluding rather than bringing together. But it will then have to resolve to live with this “enemy from within”.

The government can either decide to maintain her stand on “no dual nationality”. This implies that no government official or individual should be given preferential treatment in applying this nationality law. The second option is on revising the nationality law, thus providing for dual nationality for every Cameroonian who desires to do so. This will give a sense of belonging to Cameroonians that have accepted another nationality to still return and contribute to the development of Cameroon.

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