From geopolitics to anti-geopolitics: The story of Cameroonian bilingualism

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ABSTRACT
The aim of the article is to examine how Cameroonian bilingualism was portrayed in academic literature and how it fit into the ongoing geopolitical dynamics. The article considers two time periods for the geopolitical narrativization of African states (1960–1990 and 1990–2020). These two periods differ not only in geopolitical narrativization, but also in the shift in academic paradigms. This article employs geopolitical and anti-geopolitical approaches to show how the state's narrative of bilingualism has been filling into the globally accepted narratives. Cameroon was chosen as the extreme case, where the two former colonial languages (English and French) share the same status, defining Cameroon as a bilingual country. The conclusion of the article is that Cameroon's bilingual status has the ability to fit into the current geopolitical narratives. Beside the dominant narrative, there was present at least one important narrative.

1. Introduction

It should come as no surprise that representations of Africa have been frequently descriptive and foreign-sourced given that geopolitics is a tool of the powerful. Political centres were usually responsible for shaping the global perception of peripheral areas. The narratives about Africa have undergone substantial change over the past 60 years, and these stories frequently have an impact on how the continent and its individual nations are perceived. Cameroon in this situation is not an exception and this article researches the academic representation of this central African country that is usually labelled as "African in miniature".

This article is focused on the academic representation of the bilingualism in Cameroon and how its description was (or was not) aligned the global narratives significant for chosen periods. There should be no doubt that language has various functions. For political scientists, one of the most important *raisons d'être* of a language is, among others, the symbolism of group identity that creates the feeling of belongingness (Simpson 2008: 1). On the other hand, descriptive and ascriptive attributes of the language as an identity creator may differ, as Simpson demonstrated, in various countries within the continent. Cameroon may be perceived as an extreme case, where bilingual nature of the state with two former colonial languages (English and French) has huge potential to be examined to fill contemporary geopolitical narratives.

Article strives to answer the question *whether (and how) the academic understanding of Cameroonian bilingualism fits into the globally accepted geopolitical narratives describing Africa*. The article uses the approach of critical geopolitics, namely, the post-colonial geopolitics and the antigeopolitical perspective with the aim to evaluate stories behind the bilingual state. The article starts with description of methods and approaches used for analysis, continue with the review of Cameroonian bilingualism. The last part of the article uses academic literature to critically evaluate whether the description of Cameroon bilingualism fitted into the globally accepted dominant narratives.

2. Post-colonial geopolitics and anti-geopolitics

This article uses two approaches: critical geopolitics, namely post-colonial geopolitics and anti-geopolitics. Those two perspectives approach geopolitical narrations from different angles. The article identified dominant geopolitical narratives about Africa in two selected periods 1) 1960–1990 as the period of independence and the Cold War and 2) 1990–2020 as the period with significant culturalist shift from structuralist perspective. Those periods were framed by different dominant narratives. Language policy and Cameroonian bilingualism were selected as examples to demonstrate whether those narratives were the most significant for selected periods and how they were used to frame Cameroonian bilingualism.

To define the approaches, let us start with finding the meaning of geopolitics – for instance, S. Moiso (2015: 220) highlighted two main meanings of geopolitics. While the first one interprets geopolitics as a scholarly practice and as a subfield of political geography, the second one accentuates political practices connecting power, place, and subjects usually understood as a practice of international relations. In this article, the term geopolitics means a subfield of political geography bearing in mind the interaction between power and place.

As the term critical may suggest, the branch of critical geopolitics originates from the criticism of geopolitics (which is nowadays called classical geopolitics). P. Kelly (2006) identified nine essential differences between these two fields of geopolitics. Shortly to conclude, the critical geopolitics assumes that the world is created and perceived by observers. For this reason, two subfields of critical geopolitics were chosen – post-colonial geopolitics and anti-geopolitics. To understand post-colonial geopolitics as research tool, we can use the work of J. Sharp (2009: 7), who states: "[o]ne of the goals of postcolonialism is to include voices that have been previously excluded from academic discussions. Postcolonial writers tend to challenge the presentation of singular narratives and instead seek to include multiple voices in their work."

The anti-geopolitics was classified (Routhledge 1997) as "geopolitics from below", and as the power that is opposing the central power regardless of the holder. From that perspective, anti-geopolitics is a way to react to dominant geopolitical tendencies and it can only exist in the interaction with them. For the research of geopolitical narratives, anti-geopolitics can be called a *counter-narrative* (Dwyer, Davis, and emerald 2017: 10) The advantage of using anti-geopolitics come with the possibility to see, what is not said. Because being overwhelmed by a geopolitical narration, one must adapt to the framework of the public space that might not be created by someone else. How to deal with space that is created by someone else is shown by Scott (1985) in his research about resistance. He found out that those with power are establishing the public space and creating the ideal types of subordinates – those who are hardworking, never complaining, and loyal. Meanwhile, those without power tools create ideal attributes of masters. However, those attributes are not openly communicated in the public space and those powerless have different tools to dominate other types of spaces which are invisible and anonymous. Scott shows that private space and anonymity create an important power instrument with tools,

such as gossip, jokes, and secret symbols. From this perspective, the anti-geopolitics can be defined as private gossips, which are challenging the dominant public power narratives, and which has the potential be transformed into the dominant narrative.

3. Multi-scalar perspective

To use geopolitical approach in this study, the author identified three crucial dichotomies that can be applied to examine the research question. The first will be referred to in this article *Global*. It shows up as the Anglophone and Francophone cleavage. The second one will be called the *State's*. Its focus is on the unity against distinction, division, and external influence. This approach supports the official state centred line of bilingualism and country's indivisibility. The third dichotomy will be called *Local*, where the dichotomy is represented by interplay between indigenous languages and European post-colonial languages.

The article works with the hypothesis that Cameroon as a model country in Africa should be fitting into the narrativization of the continent. This means that in the first period, the global perspective should prevail while in the second period the state's perspective should be the dominant one. The hypothesis will be tested by identification of how the Cameroonian bilingualism was perceived and how this perception fits into the crucial identified narratives. It is expected that the geopolitical narrativization of Cameroon usually creates a competing line between the *Global* and *State's* cleavage, while the *Local* cleavage is more or less present, but never dominant. As the side product of the article, the awareness of the underestimated *Local* binarity should be raised. Thanks to critical geopolitical approaches, we should be able to identify this binarity and incorporate it into the narrativization of Cameroon bilingualism, though never as the dominant one and typically as the supporting one for the dominant narrative, which is either the *Global* or the *State's.* This binarity arises from the distinction between European and indigenous languages.

As it is significant for postcolonial geopolitics, meanwhile, the public sphere may be dominated by the *Global* or the *State's* narrative about the *Official bilingualism* and/or *Anglo-Francophone* cleavage, while the private life and private values might be influenced by the narration which was labelled as the *Local*. This can be demonstrated in the language of regional radio broadcasting which has a certain amount of time reserved for local languages used in the region (Kouega 2007: 63–67). As it may be clear, these local language broadcasts will be present mainly in cars or in homes, where they compose safe private space. The divergence between public space and private space has a significant impact on the power structure in every society and the post-colonial state is no exception.

Those spheres can serve as common tools for creating an idea of danger coming from the outsiders, that pose threat for the natives who belong to the political communities, as mentioned Mbembe (2001: 70):

> [D]iscourse on land and 'indigenousness' were common coin, and the logics of territorialization went hand in hand with those controlling 'insiders' and excluding 'outsiders.' But territory was not the exclusive underpinning of political communities, the sole mark of sovereignty, or the sole basis of civil obedience. Space was represented and used in many ways, especially when those representations and uses were closely tied to the definition of principles of belonging and exclusion.

In the context of the situation in Cameroon, we may say that the geopolitical *State's* narrative of national unity was becoming challenged by the anti-geopolitical Anglo-Francophone division with the end of the Cold war narrativization and the change of the paradigm in the social sciences. This cleavage posed a significant threat to the narrative of unity by having a binary structure. Thus, the aim of the *State's* narrative was to exclude it from the public space, which should have resulted into various upheavals and oppressions. While the indigenous languages have stayed present in private space and tolerated under the umbrella of the *State's* narrative, dominant *lingua francas,* such as the *Pidgin English* or *Camfrenglish* stayed excluded from the *State's* narration. The main aspect of how they challenge the *State's* narrative is that they have an identity-creating character that could incorporate significant parts of Cameroonian society that should stay *bilingual* with the official ideology of bilingualism, that expects mastering both English and French*.* On the other hand, the *State's* narrative maintains and tolerates the private language described in the argument while operating with public unity.

The aim might be to keep the distinction as wide as possible to ensure that the possible indigenous languages' counter-narrative does not challenge the Cameroonian unity, which is the crucial part of the *State's* narrative. It means that keeping indigenous languages within the debate may ensure that the Anglo-Francophone cleavage will be seen just as one of many and thus, not the crucial one. Moreover, the article aims to identify other non-dominant narratives within the academic literature. This is done by a narrative research analysis of selected books, that fit into the main geopolitical narratives.

4. The geopolitical framing of language policy in Africa

Sense of belongingness based on language identity can be created within different types of communities, but the states should have an exclusive role among

them. In line with this claim, the state may be perceived as an exclusive case of a shared political identity. When we are referring to the language policy of states in Africa, they have been usually perceived as some anomalies without a long-term identity reason. This approach used to be dominant for the French political scientists from 60s to 80s starting from R. Aron. From the M. Foucher's interpretation, those postcolonial states perceived the language policies as a tool for short-term aims "on the horizon and as a goal to reach", instead of a tool for a long-term goal of creating unity, based on shared values within a certain territory, in other words not as "united for the action of political unity and internal sovereignty within the borders traces on the map" (Foucher 1988: 12–13). Thus, African states were usually perceived as tools for immediate action, with a lower value than those *united states*, which were viewed as having a shared identity as their final objective. Those uniting characteristics of states were common in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Cheeseman and Fisher 2020). Since the 1990s, there has been a new wave of publications and academic works that discuss Cameroonian bilingualism as an identity aspect. This time it is characterized by the change of paradigm towards ethnicity and belongings as produced and situational aspects. Hence, main identified narratives in the text are labelled *unifying* over the first thirty years and *coercive* for the next thirty years. The research works with the question how selected academic text filled Cameroonian bilingualism into those two narratives. The question of why geopolitical instruments are used to study Cameroonian bilingualism may now be raised. It is because the language policy has all necessary power aspect of *postcolonial* state's power building processes described by A. Mbembe. He wrote that, the processes in those *postcolonial* states may be defined by something called *commandment* as a tool for domination. Such a *commandment* has three crucial characteristics of dominance: 1) creative or establishing, 2) legitimating as a one-sided relationship, 3) ensuring or maintaining (Mbembe 2001: 28). As this perspective suggests, even languages might be used as tools of dominance, when the ability to master the language of the former colonists has excluding character (power relations) rather than of an inclusive one (nation-building) and thus it may be studied and evaluated by geopolitical research approaches. During the transition period between former colonial empires and new national states, languages had all three characteristics crucial for a *commandment,* as a way to create, legitimate, and maintain dominance over those whose language proficiency was not at an acceptable level. The good knowledge of the official language of a newly independent state was essential for individuals and groups' well-being and opportunities within the state apparatus (Simpson 2008: 3). The case of Cameroon in this context might be seen as an extreme case, where the mastering of two European

languages becomes a powerful tool of the new elites. Thus, using bilingualism in the context of Cameroon might be an ideal tool for both excluding those who were not willing or able to master both languages on the required level, as well as for cementing and uniting the national identity. However, as contemporary research shows, this policy of two equal languages is not perceived as successful, where two languages serve to polarize, instead of incorporating the society (Biloa and Echu 2008: 213).

As proclaimed by the state's official policy, the public space in Cameroon has been dominated by bilingualism since 1961, when the modern Cameroonian state was established. (Achimbe 2013; Ayafor 2005; Biloa and Echu 2008; Fon 2019; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003) Nevertheless, the meaning of bilingualism has never been clearly defined and as a result, speculations on this matter were source for many misunderstandings. The multilingual status of the country and the mobility within the state blur the strict lines between Anglophones and Francophones in everyday reality. Certain authors even insist that bilingualism should not mean just an ability to master both English and French, but the state's bilingualism should also include indigenous bilingualism with one of the European languages (Fon 2019: 56).

By geopolitical narration about countries in Africa usually views them as either Anglophone or Francophone – Lusophone. Apart from some exceptions, this is based on the language of the former European colonist. The language label of the country may create certain unfulfilled expectations. Such misinterpretation of language labelling within the state borders is a focal point of a narrativization called by D. Bach a *pioneering front* (Bach 2013: 11–13). From this geopolitical narration, the language may be perceived as a clearly understandable tool if not directly for domination, then at least as a sign of crucial geopolitical dependency. In short, when it is said that a certain language is used in a certain country, it can easily create an impression of strong ties between the group of countries using the same language. For instance, the presence of the French language as the main communication tool within the Sahel countries gives an indisputable impression of French influence on the one hand, and significant shared ties among Sahel countries on the second. Nevertheless, such domination of a European language is usually not accepted internally; therefore, these language labels are usually ascriptive, which are given externally by the outsiders as the easiest mark connected to potential geopolitical domination. Senegal is a case to demonstrate how global and internal perception may differ. In this case, the knowledge of French creates opportunities for domination of the state's service, while the situation on the ground favours a local *lingua franca* – Wolof. In short, whilst Wolof became accepted as society's *lingua franca* in almost the whole country, Senegal is globally perceived as a Francophone country. Thus,

we can subconsciously expect that Senegal might be under a certain influence of France (Simpson 2008: 13). This is an example how those global, state and local perceptions (defined in previous chapter) is not the case just for Cameroon, but in Cameroon this might be the best measured due to the strong and clearly defined political lines.

At this point, it would be useful to mention, why the Cameroonian bilingualism is a complicated case. This is conditioned by its colonial heritage. Cameroon was firstly colonised by Germans and after the First World war divided into British and French Trust Territories. In 1960, the Republic of Cameroon got independence and it was decided that two British Cameroons (Northern and Southern) would participate in the plebiscite and decide whether they wanted to be a part of Nigeria or Cameroon. While the Northern region joined Nigeria, the Southern British Cameroon (contemporary regions of Northwest and Southwest) joined the Republic of Cameroon (Fig. 1)

During the constitutional talks in Foumbam it was decided that Cameroon would have bilingual status with two official languages. So, how to understand Cameroonian bilingualism, as a tool for ascription or description? As other issue in the connection between language and policy – it depends. For instance, C. Myers-Scotton possesses a question in her book about bilingualism, "how many languages are spoken within the national boundaries of Cameroon in West Africa" (Myers-Scotton 2006: 17), but, as she answered, "it depends" on what we classify as a language. According to her, there are two criteria for

Fig. 1 Cameroon language division.

classifying something as a language: 1) structure (linguistic), and 2) socio-political factors. It is commonly stated that Cameroon has between 250 and 300 languages (Biloa and Echu 2008).

Myers-Scotton, a linguist, then proposes four socio-political factors, for differentiating various situations connected to the similarity of languages, including 1) national borders, 2) cultural borders, 3) religious borders, and 4) unifying linguistic variety into one language (2006: 19–22). In the first case (national borders), she highlights the artificiality of borders as a denominator for creating different languages. Using this factor, she defines *receptive bilingualism* as the first case, where the languages are so similar that speakers of those languages can understand a speaker of the other language, although they cannot speak their language. The second case is the *dialectal continuum*, where speakers on both sides of national borders understand each other and the mutual understanding declines with growing physical distance from the borders. The second factor of political delimitation of languages (cultural borders) defines two similar languages, but different in terms of cultural circumstances (by font per example). The third factor (religious borders) refers to the situation where there is one language that is divided into two different subtypes due to the religious cleavages. As can be seen, the first, second, and third socio-political factors are not suitable for the case of Cameroon. The last factor (uniting linguistic variety into one language) describes the situation where there is one language that differs according to the location, speakers etc., but it is understood as one language. This may be the case of former colonial languages, which is the category of languages where both English and French should belong.

Thus, even though the French language used in Cameroon may differ from the French language used in Canada, it is globally seen as the same French language. As a result, Cameroon may share geopolitical (global) belonging with both the Francophonie and the Commonwealth. Achimbe (2013) for example used the terms Cameroonian French and Cameroonian English, although it is usual to use the term standard French. These standardised dialects of languages have the potential to create something which is called a *symbolic capital* which represents the way the educated people talk (Myers-Scotton 2006: 25). This *symbolic capital*, sometimes called *Good taste*, has a significant impact on the majority-minority dynamic, as pointed out by Eriksen: "For this reason, many minority members may be disqualified in the labour market and other contexts where their skills are not valued" (Eriksen 2015: 357).

By the term *bilingualism* in Cameroon usually means the mastering of standardised versions of English and French. This type of *bilingualism* is anchored in the Constitution and is based on historical processes and in the academic literature called *official bilingualism*. However, some minor voices sometimes point out that bilingualism should also take into account the minority languages and at least one European (Fon 2019: 56). In spite of the standardized version of both English and French which is required for the right *bilingualism*, it needs to be mentioned that the usual *lingua francas,* originating from either English or French by their *pidginization* (of both English and French), receives lower status in the society and its speakers are discriminated (Biloa and Echu 2008: 206). Simpson (2008: 18–22) defines four types of postcolonial language policy within the continent, namely: 1) promotion of one dominant indigenous language; 2) the European language becoming the dominant national language; 3) promotion of multilingualism as the state's added value; 4) something in between those types. Simpson ranks the case of Cameroon in the second category as a somehow deviant case, where two European languages were promoted with a significant prevalence of one of them. As a result, we can identify the Anglo-Francophone cleavage as the dominant approach that occupies the public space. However, in a case study mentioned later in Simpson's book, the case of Cameroon is labelled as *Official bilingualism in multilingual states.* Thus, multilingualism has a significant place within the study and this dichotomy is a supplement of the Cameroonian language policy. Why Simpson puts Cameroon into this category might not be clear, but at least he tried to explain that: "English and French have thus become linguistic beacons which serve to polarize and separate the population, and the uneven implementation of official bilingualism is creating serious problems for national integration" (Simpson 2008: 20).

The success of Cameroonian bilingual policy is usually rated as low level. Achimbe (2013: 8) for instance, it is highlighting that "the bilingual policy has been heavily criticised by almost all the studies on language planning." Above mentioned authors of the chapter in Simpson's book (Biloa and Echu 2008: 212) came to a conclusion that the language identity of Cameroonian bilingualism did not help to create one nation, but rather created two language identities as a symbol of allegiance. However, they highlighted some positive trends in the language identity building (Biloa and Echu 2008: 212) such as urban *lingua francas* as ascriptive identity tools. Thus, this situation shown the well-know truth that "it is not Cameroon, but Cameroonians who are bilingual" (Fon 2019: 58).

The most famous one among the identity tools eliminated from official bilingualism could be described either as *Cameroonian Pidgin English* or as *Camfranglais* being the French-based Pidgin. We can see on this pidginization of both English and French that the official bilingualism in a multilingual country faces significant challenges that may help to cement the Cameroonian national identity. For example, Achimbe (2013: 10) comes with the word *Youthspeak*, which is based on both pidginized English and French.

However, these artificial languages with identity-creating potential are usually not respected by the state, reversely to the native languages that have certain degree of autonomy and privileges – for instance in local radio broadcasting (Kouega 2007).

5. Textual analysis

5.1 Methods

The following part of this article will be divided into two chapters to answer the question about language policy as fitting into the prevailing narratives within the chosen time periods. It will focus on two equally long periods of 30 years. The first one attempts to analyse texts published between 1960 and 1990, the second examines the texts from 1990 to 2020. These two periods were chosen based on the paradigm shift in social sciences and above-mentioned prevailing narratives within the geopolitical framing identified by Cheeseman and Fisher as *unifying* up until 1990 and *coercive* since till now. As authors wrote:

> Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, many authoritarian African regimes came to depict multiparty politics as fundamentally divisive and disruptive, and used this argument to legitimate creating other kinds of political systems that they said would be better placed to promote national unity. (Cheeseman and Fisher 2020: 30)

Later on, in the 90s: "In some respects, this transformation was sweeping and profound. Between 1989 and the end of 1990s, almost all African states that were not in conflict committed themselves to holding multiparty elections of one form or another." Thus, it is expected, that Cameroon should not be an exception and academic literature might follow those narratives. The political sciences texts chosen for research are the following: C. Welch's *Dream of Unity* (1966), J. F. Bayart's *L'État au Cameroun* (1979), and *Negotiating an Anglophone identity* by P. Konings and F. Nyamnjoh (2003) as most evident for the chosen time periods. The author also used as a demonstration of the last period the study of IFRI, *Education et pouvoir dans le conflict anglophone au Cameroun* (2020), written by C. Petrigh. The text identified three levels of analysis (Global, State's and Local) and evaluate how they fit into two temporal narratives. This was done by detailed reading of selected works with the aim to identify how dominant narratives (for the chosen period) were used in each of researched level. Moreover, another aim was to find the non-dominant narratives that were present. The books (or chapters) that might be chosen with expected similar results should be David E. Gardinier's *Cameroon: United Nations Challenge to French Policy* (1963), *Politique du ventre* of Jean-Francois Bayart (1989), *Itinéraires d'accumulation au Cameroun* (1993) written under Peter

Geschiere, Piet Konings or the above-mentioned chapter concerning Cameroonian bilingualism from Biloa and Echu (2008). The author is fully aware that the chosen books have their limits in being representants of the chosen periods. However, the author expects that chosen books outline the main ideas of the chosen periods and describe the evolution of the *official state bilingualism*, which changed from a source of pride to an identity tool for leverage. Even though these books may be seen as fully fitting into the above-mentioned narratives, the main aim of using them is to critically evaluate the prevailing narratives in those books and try to find others narratives that were not less significant in selected academic literature.

5.2 The Dreams of unity and accumulation

Starting with an analysis of the texts from the 60s, the literature viewed Cameroon as an example of possible pan-African unity after independence. Thus, the narrativization of the period of the 60s was based on a geopolitical narration of independence against the post-colonial powers. Despite the European languages creating a crucial framework, they were more or less a uniting tool for achieving the same aim. The key text chosen as defining the period was C. Welsch's *The Dream of Unity*, where Cameroon appears in several crucial narrative stories.

The first one treats the *Kamerun Idea*, which is based on the unity of German historical Cameroon and the idea of the future federation as a possible accommodation of two different systems. What can give us a clue about the general narrativization of K. Welsch are the last pre-independence elections in Southern Cameroon in 1959. Those elections are presented as a victory of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (K.N.D.P.). Firstly, the name of the party refers to the united German Cameroon. Secondly, there was a pamphlet issued before the elections, titled "The Secession Charter of the Kamerun National Democratic Party". The document consisted of four arguments and cited fourteen advantages of secession (Welsch 1966: 200–201). The first story which appears in the text works with the narrative of Cameroon unity – it says that after fifty years under the German administration, "we developed a sense of oneness in all aspects of life" from "conglomeration of ethnic communities" (Welsch 1966: 200). The second narrative was about the unsatisfying and inequitable financial arrangements coming from abroad. In this case Nigeria was responsible for making the Southern Cameroons suffer (Welsch 1966: 200). The last story behind the declaration may be labelled as a dividing one, as the main division is between Cameroonians and Nigerians where "we differ in culture, tradition, and in our entire general outlook" (Welsch 1966: 200). Thus, these three narratives can be 1) *the unifying* stories of Cameroonian unity, 2) the tale of *neglected* administration by the external rulers, and 3) the narrative of

difference mainly in the cultural matters used against Nigerians and particularly against Ibos. Thus, here we can see that the geopolitical narrativization was mainly state-based, ensuring the unity of a post-colonial state against Great Britain as a colonial power. However, the Brits were actually represented by Nigerians or Igbos.

On the other side of the border, in French Cameroon, Ahidjo took power in 1958. In his speech from February 1958, he stated that reunification is "the dream of all Cameroonians" (Welsch 1966: 210). The main goal of his new government, to be accomplished in the shortest time possible, was to gain independence. However, he proclaimed that the problem of division "must receive a solution before the proclamation of our independence" (Welsch 1966: 211). From this perspective, there were only two narratives in French Cameroon, concretely 1) *unification* as a permanent dream and 2) *independence* from Paris. However, as Welsch mentioned, the situation in French Cameroon was violent even before independence. The brutality of both *maquisards* as well as of the government-supported by the French spread even to Southern Cameroon and was a significant tool for pro-British politicians who were opposing reunification (Welsch 1966: 232). This whole time period was later labelled as a taboo topic in Cameroon which reappeared only at the end of the millennium. (Deltombe, Domergue, and Tatsitsa 2011)

If we look closer at the development of the situation before the plebiscite and on the 1961 plebiscite itself, the crucial part for the politicians from Southern Cameroons, who were also talking about the reconstruction of "Kamerun", was creating Cameroon on "the basis of equality between the partners, thus protecting the distinctive backgrounds of the English-speaking and French-speaking sectors" (Welsch 1966; 228). However, the essential question in this context is what was meant by the quotes of "equality" and "protecting backgrounds". These two terms definitely meant something different for authors in the 60s, when Welsch's book was written, than for authors in the following years. Welsch also shows an interesting fact about the campaign itself, where he presupposed an inability of people to understand what they would be actually voting for, as can be shown by the following quotation:

> In low-literacy society such as the Southern Cameroons, complex explanations of constitutional guarantees had little impact. The issues were too abstract, unrelated to the realities of daily life. The campaign was conducted rather on more familiar issues, in particular Nigerian immigration, terrorism in the Cameroun Republic, vague sentiment of Cameroonian 'brotherhood', the economic development undertaken by the Germans and the stagnation under the British, the desire to maintain the existing way of life, and ethnic solidarity behind a particular party. (Welsch 1966: 231)

To sum up, the situation in the 60s was perceived in a way that the most important thing was the uniting of Cameroon as a single, united, and federal country with two languages. The geopolitical division was stressing the post-colonial dimension of united Cameroon, and geopolitical narratives which were centring the unity against European colonists and their proxies prevailed in both federal parts. During the following years, the subject of Anglo-Francophone cleavage disappeared from the academic narrativization.

Cameroon enters into the 70s with a crucial narrative of post-colonial states which are different from the Western states. This period of the Cold war may be framed as *non-western exotism*, where there was a search for finding their differences from the ideal Western states. Significant for this period was something that Mbembe (2001: 3) later described as the narrativization of Africa: "pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people." Thus, the period of the 70s and the 80s can be characterized as mostly being about what Africa, African states, and societies are not, instead of being about what they actually are. The academic literature suffered by "dogmatic assertions, cavalier interpretations, and shallow rehearse" (Mbembe 2001: 9). As a significant book for this period about the Cameroonian state, it was chosen J. F. Bayart's *L'État au Cameroun*. In the preface of the book, the Anglo-Francophone axis is mentioned as an existing cleavage, but the multi-ethnic character of Cameroonian society is highlighted in the previous paragraphs. Moreover, bilingualism is perceived as some added value for Cameroon, instead of some sort of disadvantage or a root of a potential conflict (Bayart 1979: 9). Referendum concerning the unitary state is again perceived as "inevitable political progress with centralisation ensuring Francophone dominance" and a "presidential system ensuring great stability" (Bayart 1979: 10). The whole narrative within the book works on the assimilation of ancient and post-colonial elites (Bayart 1979: 19). The absence of a chapter about the language policy signifies how inessential this topic was valued. Thus, Bayart claimed that Cameroonians were benefiting from the existence of a state which is able to ensure political stability and participation in the global economy. This narrative was copying the world's approach, as the book was published in the year when Margaret Thatcher was elected the British Prime Minister for the first time and only two years before the election of Ronald Regan. The whole global narrative of the First World was focused on the ongoing *Cold War* with significant *laissez-faire* and free-market approaches. Thus, Bayart's book might serve as another brick in the wall and it can help us understand that for the situation until the 90s, the language/identity policy was not as important as the unity promotion. Meanwhile, the economic issues in the light of the oil crisis were emphasised. Alongside such prevalent narratives, the description additionally

functioned as what could be described as non-western exotism.

5.3 Coercive multipartism

The change of perception of Cameroon (viewing it as a united and stable country) started to appear at the beginning of the 90s, because of two historical events and changing and paradigm from structuralist approach. The first one was the end of the Cold War, but the more significant one was the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the Yugoslavian war. Thus, the 90s in Africa were framed by the fear of *Balkanisation* on the one hand, and the threat of another *genocide* on the second. The events in Rwanda, but also an influential book by R. Kaplan had an indisputable impact on how countries in Africa started to be perceived. Short period of global focus on the continent allowed the promotion of existing cleavages, based on different identity characteristics, yet respecting the established borders. The book that has been chosen for framing this period is Konins and Nyamnjoh's *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon* (2003)*.*

In the first part of the book, the authors highlight that despite the building of a nation, "the primary concern had been to integrate the diverse ethno-regional groups into the state and place them under the centralised authority" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003). This was followed by the political disregard of this issue in spite of various identities. Nevertheless, the post-colonial state used any opportunity to foster conflict and to "deconstruct the Anglophone identity" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 2). The book adopts the existence of various identities which were not taken into account during the previous period, and it states that there should be at least three strong identity-based power elites in Cameroon, namely: 1) Muslim-Fulbe with the power-centre in Garoua, 2) Beti surrounding the capital of Yaounde, and 3) the Francophone Bamilikele in the West region. According to Konings and Nyamnjoh, the first two ethnics were creating the political-administrative power axis, while the third one was responsible for the development of entrepreneurship. Talking about the Anglophone identity and other identities, another aspect which needed to be mentioned was another axis based on coastal and hinterland division. Concerning the economic issues, the text mentioned the economic growth thanks to the petrol, and later the economic fall from 1986–1993, which resulted into the popular discontent. According to the text, the first opposition party, Social Democratic Front (SDF), took "advantage of widespread Anglophone resentment to their allegedly second-rate citizenship, in the Francophone-dominated unitary state" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 8). In essence, the book's preface refers to both as either geopolitical or anti-geopolitical cleavages.

However, it might be mentioned that the *Local* cleavage and *State's* perspective should promote and even highlight the *Global* division of the structure of Cameroonian society. Within the text, Konigs and Nyamnjoh clearly distinguish the Anglophone and the Francophone aims. For instance, in the chapter concerning the Federation, they wrote that, "Francophone elite was never in favour of federalism," or that, "hegemonic tendencies of the Francophone-dominated state and even of the Francophone population as a whole, which would invariably lead to a further 'marginalisation, exploitation and assimilation' of the Anglophone region" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 66–67). The narrative of national unity was strongly supported in the 80s and lasted till the beginning of the 90s, when the anti-geopolitical narrative was introduced, as "Anglophone Cameroonians were termed 'Biafrans'" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 77) – a foreign aspect within the country (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 88).

Concerning the bilingual and multilingual status of the country, Konings and Nyamnjoh noted that Biya's regime was trying to deconstruct Anglophone identity by highlighting the bilingual and multilingual status of the state (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 109). They called this approach 'divide and rule', and in this context the author understood the *State's* geopolitical narrative of bilingualism as a coercive tool. From the *State's* perspective, both (*Global and Local*) divisions would be considered as anti-geopolitical and opposing the state's bilingual narrative by

> trivialisation and demonization of the Anglophone problem, the establishment of the control over the state media, the punishing of any journalist and/or public intellectual who has dared to propagate Anglophone identity and solidarity, and encouragement of the ethnic-regional print media, as well as outright repression. (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 136)

Based on previous evidence, they claim that "the idea of reunification appears to have been much more popular among the Francophone population than among Anglophones in the southern quadrant" (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003: 194). Moreover, later appeared studies criticising the *official bilingualism* as an unsuccessful policy (Ayafor 2005: 140) and thus, this systematic prevalence of *Global* narrative preserved the Anglo-Francophone cleavage as a core of Cameroonian policy for the future.

If we move to the second decade of the 21st century, we can document that it was determined by the rebellion of the Anglophone teachers and judges. These rebellions later became violent, and in English-speaking global press (Guardian, BBC) they were presented as "Anglophone rebellion against marginalisation later evolved into a violent fight of separatists" (Kučera 2020). The labelling of the conflict on the cleavage of Anglophone people against Francophone government appeared to be crucial for this period, but

such narration creates an impression of a people-centred movement against the political elites, which was a globally common narrative. In her study, Petright (2020: 6) focuses only on the Anglophone regions which she calls NoSO (Northwest and Southwest region). This name later became a neutral label for these two Anglophone regions. She suggested that the ongoing conflict was based on symbolism, where the fight against the school system is a proxy tool for fighting the state and its institutions. She highlighted that the aims of a state within the context of the language policy were two – to promote unity, and to assimilate the different (Petright 2020: 8). Thus, we can conclude that even though the *State's* narrative and approach have not changed, yet the global trends have undergone evolution and subsequently the changed global narrative pushed *State's* perception into the category of the anti-geopolitical narrative. Petright notes that the language policy was not the core of the conflict but served more as an understandable proxy to show dissatisfaction with the poor government (Petright 2020: 13). This claim may be one of proofs which shows that the Anglo-Francophone cleavage narrative might have been exploited, based on the globally prevailing geopolitical narration of *the pioneering fronts*.

However, the economic fall in 2016 connected with Naira devaluation and economic consequences for NoSo is almost missing from the perspective of the contemporary texts. From these texts, it seems that, in contrast to the narration from the 70s to the 90s, the economic issue did not play any role in political mobilisation based on the language policy. Unluckily, such narration creates a space for misinterpretation of the ongoing processes as purely linguistic and identity based, meanwhile one may assume that the economic issues have played a significant role just like at the beginning of the 90s.

6. Conclusion

This article used the approach of post-colonial geopolitics and anti-geopolitics to answer the question *whether (and how) the academic description of Cameroonian bilingualism fits into the globally accepted geopolitical narratives describing Africa*. It analysed significant academic texts about the Cameroonian political system in the temporal context. Its conclusion is that even though Cameroon fits into the narratives significant for certain periods, there was always present at least one another narrative that was also strong, but it did not have the force to become a label of the period (Tab. 1).

The text concludes that the period between 1960 and 1990 mentioned the language policy and the question of bilingualism rarely. Beside the ongoing Cold war narrative, the texts were focused on independence (on colonial powers), unity (Cameroonian), centralisation, accumulation, and integration. The used text from 1966 put the general narration of the potential conflict between Cameroonians and foreigners not only cultural but also economic and administrative. Within the context, the situation after 1975 favoured the economic narration, and the possibility of a strong government was viewed as a required pretext for economic development, while the language policy and the questions of English and French were perceived as a comparative advantage for economic development.

The fear of genocide and promotion of language identity on the one hand was accompanied with the global fear of possible balkanization of African continent since 1990s. Even, though this period is globally labelled as a period of democracy promotion, selected books were underlying different topics connected with culturalist shift. As it was demonstrated in the chosen texts, the focus was not only on the contemporary geopolitical narratives, but also on cultural identities and inequalities in general. This was happening whilst the state was trying to ensure the dominance of the bilingual and uniting narratives. As it was demonstrated, the texts in the 90s were also dealing with the economic and public life inequalities, where the identity cleavage played a significant role. The focus on those inequalities in later texts became slightly less apparent, which led towards the acceptance of the contemporary geopolitical cleavage as the Anglo-Francophone, which consequently turned into the dominant label. This also copies the dominant narratives since 2014, when the geopolitics became more competitive and less liberal democracy dominant.

Last but not least, the author of this text would encourage greater caution when we present previous issues in the optic of a contemporary perspective. For instance, the narrativization of Anglo-Francophone cleavage, which arose in 2016, should not be labelled as more than 50 years of political marginalisation of Anglophones as it should rather be labelled as 30 years of language policy ignoration or as a state-building with the following years of political Anglophone mobilisation. During the process of Cameroonian state building, there were various identity groups that were marginalised under the umbrella of political unity. The Anglo-Francophone cleavage grew in importance within the global narrative of *the Scramble for Africa*, thanks to the global perception

Tab. 1 Prevailing narratives.

	Global	State's	Local
1960–1990	Against foreigners (British/French; Nigerians)	Centralisation as an advantage (Economic/Politic)	Integration and accumulation
1990–2020	Language policy as cleavage	Coercive (and repressive) state (Divide and rule)	Ethnics as cleavage

that such cleavages received a wider space for being exploited. As a result, the author came to the conclusion that even though Cheeseman and Fisher`s narratives are valid and important, they does not serve itself for describing the situation, at least in the case of Cameroon.

Moreover, the author would like to highlight the lack of economical description of the situation of Anglophone regions in the second decade of the 21st century. The modern texts about the upheaval in NoSo do not mention this part which was significant for the political processes of previous periods. From this perspective, the description of the economic situation and its impact on Anglophone's mobilization would be helpful for understanding Cameroonian politics in its complexity and not just from the perspective of language and identity mobilisation. Therefore, some research about the economic situation and its impact on Anglophone mobilisation would be beneficial.

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