

**ENGLISH AND FRENCH AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN CAMEROON:
THE INTENTIONALITY OF COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND THE
FAILURE OF A CAMEROON-CENTRIC IDENTITY; 1884 AND AFTER**

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ABSTRACT

In the globalized world of today, geographic frontiers have become almost virtual and relations between cultures are manifested through diverse configurations that not only demonstrate the prowess and identity of the different cultures but through their uniqueness, enable the different cultures to sell themselves in the global cultural market. One of these is the national language(s) of a country. Cameroon was colonized by Germany (1884-1916) and 're-colonized' by Britain and France (1916-1961). After independence and since then, the various constitutions of the Republic continue to uphold that 'the official languages of Cameroon shall be French and English' (Cameroon, 1961, 1972; 1996). Using historical research principles to collect data and present this analysis, I attempt to trace the origin and evolution of English and French and their sustained use as official languages in Cameroon. I argue that contrary to the colonial discourse which upholds alien languages as part of the civilizing mission, they represent the most powerful tool for colonial subjugation. Both the British and the French like their German predecessors intentionally suppressed the emergence and use of local vernaculars- one or two of which would have ultimately emerged as national language(s) after independence. The failure of the nation to replace these languages at independence demonstrates a failure in our search for uniqueness; a Cameroon-centric identity. I conclude that, contrary to popular opinion that English and French put Cameroon on an advantageous position in our globalized world, and beyond the fact that these languages demonstrate the permanency of neo-colonialism, the country is *pseudo*-represented on the global market place of national languages if globalization means a melting pot of local/national cultures; one identity fed by multiple sources (Burbules and Torres 2000:193); a renewed importance of the local and the dissolution of erstwhile colonial identities (Mebrahtu et al 2000:46); unity in diversity; and most especially the obsolescence of the explanation of difference in terms of centre and periphery or my colonial master and I (Slater 1998: 655).

Keywords: Indigenous, National, official Languages, Colonial Representation, Globalization, Cameroon-centric Identity.