

Article

Imbalanced Development of Transport Infrastructure in Anglo-French Cameroons and Its Impact on the Political Evolution of the Territories, 1916-2022

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Abstract: This paper seeks to evaluate the impacts of the uneven development of transport infrastructure in former British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun on the political evolution of both entities. It investigates the rationale behind the introduction of modern transport and communication systems in Cameroon by various colonial administrations, and the spatial differences of the infrastructure development, so as to ascertain the role of the imperialists in creating the transport problem plaguing the country. Exploring primary and secondary historical sources, this write-up argues that the desire to ease the evacuation of tropical raw materials by German planters and merchants engendered the development of the transport system in Kamerun. Conversely, the Anglo-French compelled by some key provisions in the Mandate and Trusteeship Agreements did not all ensure the socio-economic development of their respective spheres of influence in the former German Protectorate. Consequently, French investments created disparity in the transport set-up first within Cameroun, as it was concentrated on the port city of Douala and its environs, and with the British Southern Cameroons, which remained largely neglected. It concludes that this apparent British disregard for the improvement on the transport groundwork in her own sector, later influenced the political debate during the independence struggle, as some Southern Cameroonians advocated for the (re)unification option simply to benefit from the development guarantees from leading French Camerounians. However, such assurances hardly came to fruition leaving many Anglophones hapless within the post-independent state. In summary, the article recommends an all-encompassing development policy of transport infrastructure to be adopted by the government of Cameroon, so that it can hearken to the aspirations of former Southern Cameroonians.

Keywords: imbalanced development, transport infrastructure, political evolution, mandatory powers, Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon

1. Introduction

Transport infrastructure refers to the framework that supports the system for circulation of persons and goods (IGI Global, 2022). It consist of fixed installations and comprises of roads, highway, streets, roadways and bridges; crossing structures like sidewalks, bike paths; and all areas for vehicular use namely: travel lanes, entrances and outlets and parking services; railways, airways, waterways, canals and pipelines; and terminals such as airports, railway stations, bus stopovers, warehouses, docking and transit facilities. Transport infrastructure plays a critical role in explaining the differences in growth between regions or states. Infrastructure and growth nexus is of importance especially for developing countries which have to bridge the gap with the economically advanced nations. It is worth noting that there is substantial literature review that evaluates the impacts of transport infrastructure on socio-economic development. This paper analyses regional accessibility through existing transport networks and the relationship between such ease of access, the logistics substructure and political evolution of Anglo-French Cameroons. The purpose of this write-up is to underscore the complexity and interconnection of this relationship. Reason being that, the growth performance of British Southern Cameroons lagged behind French Cameroun, and this fact is often attributed to the infrastructural gap between these territories.

In this regard, this study examines the transport infrastructure in Anglo-French Cameroons with emphasis on the variations occasioned by the imperialistic tendencies of the French, the parsimony of the British, and the biased development plans of the post-independent administrations. By highlighting these discrepancies in the improvement on the transport network in both territories, the paper intends to provide vital insights as to why such concrete aspects of nation building should be holistically adopted by the authorities to avoid the dissenting voices within the minority Anglophone community in Cameroon. The following questions constitute the main preoccupation of the research: Did the non-conformity or partial compliance with international engagements by the Mandatory powers in Cameroon contribute to the development challenges

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the country presently faces in the transport sector? What have been the impacts of the imbalanced transport infrastructure development in the Anglophone and Francophone regions of Cameroon on the political life of the nation?

2. Location of the Study Area

The Republic of Cameroon is situated at the Eastward bend of the Gulf of Guinea, where the coastline turns towards the South (Ngwa, 1978). It straddles Western and Central Africa, and lies approximately between latitudes 2 and 13 degrees North of the Equator, and longitudes 8 and 16 degrees East of the Greenwich Meridian. It has a surface area of 475 000 square kilometers. Its seashore is interrupted by the extension of the Mount Cameroon, and stretches through the Akwayafe river, Rio-del-Rey in the West, through the towns of Debundscha, Victoria, Tiko, Douala and Kribi down to the border with Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni) in the South. Historically, the name Cameroon or Kamerun in German, was originally used to refer only to the port city of Douala and its environs. This was until 1902, when a decision of the German administration gave this appellation to the entire territory. It was initially a German Protectorate before becoming two League of Nations Mandates that were to be separately administered by Britain and France. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the South West, the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the West, Chad to the North East, Central African Republic to the East, Congo-Brazzaville to the South East, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the South, as shown on Figure 1. Agriculture is the mainstay of Cameroon's economy given its many agro-ecological zones.



Figure 1. Position of Cameroon with Key Locations and Transport Infrastructure.

Source: Country Reporter, "Transportation Map of Cameroon", 31 May 2020. Available on the website: <https://country.report>, accessed on 1 September 2022.

3. Historical Origins of the Imbalanced Development of Transport Infrastructure in Anglo-French Cameroons

European powers were attracted to Africa, given its proximity and the numerous opportunities it offered in redressing their economic problems, in the wake of competitive industrialization, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Epale, 1985). Subsequently, there was the intensive search for territories on the continent which culminated in the opening of vast capitalist plantations, mines and trading sites. However, in an attempt to build a peripheral colonial economy, a major problem that the colonialists were confronted with was that of evacuating tropical raw materials back to Europe. This necessitated the construction of roads and railways linking major agro-industrial zones in the immediate hinterlands to coastal ports and wharves, and the establishment of shipping companies to connect the Gulf of Guinea with Europe through sea routes. In the context of Cameroon, the European powers (Firstly, Germany and later Britain and France), and the post-independent governments, which administered the territory in successive historical periods, took measures to improve on the transport infrastructure in order to facilitate the movement of goods and persons within its frontiers, and eventually, overseas through maritime and later air routes.

Whereas the Germans were driven by economic imperatives to develop the transport system in Kamerun, the incentive to improve on this sector by Britain and France was of a different kind (Tazifor, 2003). This was because both powers were enjoined to ensure the socio-economic development of their respective zones of the former German Protectorate following its partition during the First World War. In this vein, Article 2 of the Mandate Agreement states: "The Mandatory powers shall be responsible for the peace, order and good governance of the territory and for the promotion of the material and moral wellbeing and social progress of its inhabitants". Equally, Article 10 of the Trusteeship Agreement stipulates: "The Administering Authority in accordance with Article 76 of the United Nations (UN) Charter shall promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the territory [...]". By extrapolation from these clauses therefore, it is clear that the transport sector had to be developed, since it was an integral part of the socio-economic life in Anglo-French Cameroons. However, as France took a keen interest in improving the transport network in her own portion of Kamerun in accordance with the afore-cited international arrangements and her policy of *la Mise en valeur* or Development, Britain on the other hand, did very little in this domain. As a result, this left her own sphere of the former German Protectorate trailing that of France, not just in terms of transport and communication infrastructure, but also in other facets of life.

3.1 Development of Transport Infrastructure in Kamerun

The German Imperial administration in Kamerun, like other European colonial governments in West Africa, did not begin to construct, or even encourage the opening of motorable roads until after 1900 (Fanso, 1982). According to the British Historian Antony Gerald Hopkins, road building was not given primacy because at any time before 1918, the motor car was a new invention without a market in tropical Africa. In fact, by 1905, the few existing roads were still privately owned by the plantation companies. For instance, the Gesellschaft NordWest Kamerun or the Northwest Trading Corporation, founded on 31st July 1899, raised 100 000 German marks, a large quota of which was destined for the construction of roads, canals and railways. Elsewhere, there were a limited number of footpaths or 'marching lines', wide enough to take a column of German soldiers carrying max guns and ammunition and possibly even handcarts and ox-carts. Nonetheless, from the very beginning of their Imperial rule in Kamerun, the Germans knew that roads were an administrative, commercial and military necessity. Given that, these tracks were required to enable the use of country carts where possible, or special tropicalized automobiles and other mechanical transport, whenever they were available in the future. The aim being to make travel easier, faster, cheaper and safer. Though, it should be understood that, the Germans like other European imperialists in Africa, were more concerned with creating outlets to expedite the evacuation of tropical raw materials to their home country and not to ensure the free movement of the indigenes. All in all, the building of roads and their maintenance soon became the responsibility not only of the Imperial administration, but also of the strictly supervised African communities especially those defeated in wars of resistances. Thus, by the end of the 1910s, motor or ox-cart and 'marching roads' were already a familiar and common feature, and the construction or rather the 'digging' of access ways began to make headway from the coastal districts into the hinterlands of the Protectorate.

Earth roads were constructed in the South Eastern portion of Kamerun linking many vicinities (Essomba, 2011). Some of them included the following: Lolodorf-Nkomakak track; Ambam-Ebolowa-Sangmelima lane; Abong-Mbang-Doume-Nguelemenduga axis; Edea-Bambimbi-Yaounde highway; Yaounde-Olama-Lolodorf-Bipindi-Kribi motorway, Ngoulemakon-Ebolowa-Efoulan road and Ambam-Ntem-Campo trajectory. However, the road-building projects were complicated by the rugged nature of the terrain which required the erection of an unusually large number of bridges over some tracks. Cases in point being the passageways over the Bomono, Yapoma, Dibamba and Lokundje rivers; and along the Bipindi-Kribi stretch as well as the Yaounde-Kribi highway. Only a few of these viaducts were suspended and could be found mostly in certain coastal regions, while the vast majority of crossings over streams and rivers in villages were made up of logs of wood tight together to form a shaky passage. The Nordbahn or the Northern Railway Line was the first of its kind in the Protectorate and covered some 160 kilometers, bridging the coastal port at Bonaberi and the inland town of Nkongsamba. It cut through the Mounjo region and had collection points in the following localities: Maka, Bomono, Sufa, Nkapa, Souza, Kaké, Maléké, Kompina, Mbanga, Moundeck, Ndjoungo, Mombo, Njombe, Penja, and Loum. Next was the Mittellandbahn or the Midland Railway Line, which was envisaged to connect Douala and Yaounde upon completion. But unfortunately, only part of it covering 160 kilometers up to the town of Eseka specifically at Widimenge, had been constructed and open to traffic by 17 June 1914, due the outbreak of the First World War which disrupted work on it. There were also stations along these railways notably between Bidjocka and Eseka on the Edea-Yaounde road; and at So Dibanga, near the Nyong river.

Beside these main lines, were narrow-gauge rail tracks constructed by the German planters in the economic and administratively busy areas to ease the clearance of cash crops to assembly points and for transportation of people (NAB, 1916). The existence of this monorail system permitted the localities of Ekona, Missellelle, Meanja, Tiko, Victoria, Moliwe and Molyko around the plantations, to have a small functioning train service. These railroads served a vital function, for they not only provided means for the conveyance of passengers at a speed hitherto unheard of, but also provided the only mode of transporting heavier or bulkier commodities which formed the major part of exports from the Protectorate. In addition, railways, unlike roads, provided all-year-round transport amenities. But regrettably, the rail lines brought untold suffering in the manpower conscripted for their construction and were not easily accessible to all the interior communities in Kamerun. The only attempt made to bring lines closer to such areas was to build secondary roads to serve and aid linkages, not to complete them.

Owing to the laborious and expensive nature of constructing road and railways, attention was turned to river transport, with some navigable waterways such as the Mungo, Abo, Sanaga and Nyong, Lokundje, Kele and Ngwe, used to ferry timber

and some other tropical products to the coast (Etoga, 1968). These cargoes were evacuated by floating them on rafts to the coastal ports for onward shipment overseas. Such streams were at times connected to earth roads and railways at certain stages in their courses. However, river transport was often slow and inconvenient owing to the presence of rapids, dead trees, sand bars and hydrophytes that grew across canals and had to be cleared occasionally. Moreover, seaports and wharves were created in Douala, Victoria, Kribi, Campo and Tiko, where ships of the Moewe-type could anchor and be loaded with bananas, cocoa, kola nuts, palm kernel, palm oil, rubber as well as unprocessed timber destined for Germany. These voyages were done every two weeks by vessels belonging to the Woermann Linie, the Hamburg Amerika Linie and the Hamburg Afrika Linie. Since these liners were not well adapted to the shipment of fresh bananas, the fruits had to be processed into dried flour to make them more convenient for conveyance to Europe. Overtime, plantation companies operating in the Tiko area transported their produce through the big wharf at Keka that was regularly visited by refrigerated steamers, which shipped their fruits to Europe under the most favorable conditions. The British who later administered a portion of Kamerun, tried to improve on the road network though their effort was largely inconsequential.

3.2 Development of Transport Infrastructure in the British Southern/West Cameroon(s)

In a bid to encourage the building of roads in the Cameroons and Bamenda provinces, the British maintained compulsory labor for the public works in the home districts of each indigene (Ardener, and Ardener, 1960). It was to be sanctioned by the administration, while the manual worker was to be paid the current wage. Nonetheless, this decision seemed to have been taken out of compunction, given that the transport and communication system in the territory remained generally neglected during the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. For example, roads were left in deplorable shapes, especially during the rainy season owing to the numerous ravines and streams whose torrents rage after tropical storms. This made highways costly to build, as they suffered from rapid deterioration of surfaces and the washing away of bridges. Yet, being an elongated narrow strip of territory, the Southern Cameroons depended for better administration and integration of its economy, on the completion and maintenance of a good-all-weather 67 kilometer-long road spanning from Victoria, Tiko, Mutengene, Muyuka, Kumba, in the South, through Mamfe to Bamenda in the North. It had the following secondary outlets: the Victoria-Buea stretch, covering a distance of 27.359 kilometers; Kumba-Bakossiland-Loum lane that extended to Nkongsamba in the North and Douala in the South; Kumba-Mukonge-Mundane access way to the Mungo river; and the Kumba-Mbonge track up to the Ndian river. In good condition, this road network was to greatly facilitate movement of goods and persons between the rural areas of Bamenda and Mamfe, and the plantation areas of Victoria and Kumba. But unfortunately, only a short distance of 102.998 kilometers of this major highway was tarred and this was as far as Kumba. Reason being that work had to be suspended on it without reaching the other divisional headquarters, due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Consequently, the path between Kumba and Mamfe, difficult at any time, became impassable to normal traffic because of mud and the collapse of culverts after heavy rains. A huge bridge building program had to be undertaken from 1955 to 1956 such that, between Buea and Mamfe, a distance of 283.245 kilometers, the track had about 450 viaducts. In this state of affairs, it was only around 1959 that some progress was made in the grading and tarring of roads, but still, the political uncertainty over the territory, led to a reduction of the Federal budgetary allocation for the construction of motorways. There was an earth road too, crossable only during the dry season, which bridged the territory with Nigeria through Mamfe, while two other tracks of similar nature linked it with French Cameroun and extended from Kumba to Loum and from Bamenda to Mbouda in that order. However, between 1959 and 1960, accessibility to Southern Cameroons through the border districts of Tombel and Santa was disrupted by the disturbances of the Maquisards, who were armed militants of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (U.P.C.), operating in the Bamileke area. The three North Western divisions were subsequently disenclaved and integrated with the main North-South highway of the territory by a 365-kilometer-long Ring-Road of laterite superstructure, which was traversable throughout the year during its heydays. It connected Bamenda town with the Ndop plain, Nsoland, Nkambe and Wum, and then got back to the city, to complete a rough circle. In many cases, villagers were encouraged to dig 'community development' access ways to this public road. It was essential in the transportation of produce of some agro-industrial undertakings like the Santa Coffee Estate and the Ndu Tea Estate, as well as those of peasant farmers from the Grassfields to the coastal ports.

After the British Southern Cameroons gained political independence by (re)unifying with the Republic of Cameroun on 1st October 1961, some infrastructural projects were initiated by the Federal government such as the construction of the Douala-Tiko-Victoria road in 1969 (Fanso, 1989). It not only reduced the hundreds of kilometers roundabout itinerary from Victoria through Kumba, Loum, Mbanga to Douala, to a mere 56 kilometers, but also united the modernized coastal-belt of East and West Cameroons, thereby ending the long economic isolation of the latter federated state. Agricultural products were transported using this motorway to the port city of Douala and other major cities in Cameroun. Also, the Bamenda-Bafoussam highway was redone, while work on the Kumba-Mamfe road was ongoing. Likewise, arrangements were underway for the reconstruction of the first phase of the Ring-Road from Bamenda to Kumbo in Nso, which had been abandoned to deteriorate, when the country was hit by the 1986/87 World Economic Crisis. But then, the old road from Mile 17 in the Buea Municipality to Kumba and Loum, narrow, winding and ridden with potholes, remained un-rehabilitated. It was the same scenario with the lane from Muyuka to Penda Mboko in Cameroun, which was merely passable, thanks to the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), which used it to transport its produce. Given the poor state of the roads in these areas, traveling between various communities had become a nightmare for many local inhabitants by 2019, as shown on Figure 2.

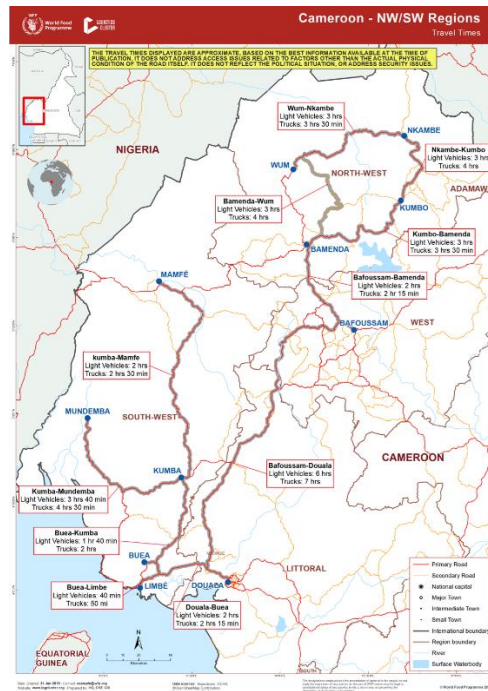


Figure 2: Location of Major Roads and their Travel Durations in the Northwest and Southwest Regions, 2019.

Source: WFP “Cameroon Road Network”, 8 December 2019, Logistics Capacity Assessment (LCA), N° 2.3. Available on the website: <https://www.dlca.logcluster.org>, accessed on 1 September 2022.

Figure 2 shows the road network and the time spent by people in traveling in and around the Northwest and Southwest regions in 2019. The itinerary through the Ring-Road had the following durations: Bamenda-Kumbo stretch measuring 94.3 kilometers, could be covered in 3 hours using light vehicles, and 3 hours 30 minutes if the passengers went by trucks; Nkambe-Kumbo lane with a distance of 58 kilometers, could be completed after 3 hours in small cars, and 4 hours in lorries; Wum-Nkambe motorway spanning 112 kilometers, could be done in 3 hours by car, and 3 hours 30 minutes by heavy duty automobiles; Bamenda-Wum road extending over a distance of 74.6 kilometers could be covered in 3 hours by bus, and 4 hours if the travelers went by trucks. Moving from Bamenda to the neighbouring West regional chief town of Bafoussam, separated by a 78 kilometer expanse of land, took 2 hours by van, and 2 hours 15 minutes by lorry. Similarly, in the adjacent Southwest region, it took 1 hour 40 minutes by motorcar, and 2 hours using trailers to leave from Buea to Kumba passing through a 76 kilometer wide territory. The distance between Buea and Douala by road measuring about 68 kilometers, could be finished in 2 hours in small buses, and 2 hours 15 minutes using heavy duty vehicles. The two coastal towns of Limbe and Buea linked by a 32 kilometer-long road, could be covered in 40 minutes by motorcar, and 50 minutes with the use of larger automobiles. The Kumba-Mundemba road estimated to be 114 kilometers in length was the most difficult lane to drive through at any period of the year as passengers had to take off as long as 3 hours 40 minutes to reach their destination in small buses, and up to 4 hours 30 minutes if they traveled by lorries. The Kumba-Mamfe highway measuring approximately 156.7 kilometers, could be traversed in 2 hours with motorcars and 2 hours 30 minutes, if the journey was made using trailers. This was probably due to some rehabilitation work done on the latter road.

The relics of the 160.934 kilometers of light rail system left behind in the plantations by Germany, hardly got any attention from the British administrative authorities, especially as her planters still dominated the agro-industrial sector during the Mandate period. The construction of a trans-frontier railway line was launched after 1963, and it was envisaged to connect Mbanga in East Cameroon and Kumba in West Cameroon. Dubbed the ‘(Re)unification Line’, the first section was done up to Ediki, in December 1965, and measured some 30 kilometers upon conclusion of work on the site in 1968. This short deviation of the former German Northern Railway Line to Kumba, was used mainly by passengers and for delivering local foodstuffs to Douala, while the main track still handled timber and cash crops from the Mounjo region to the coastal port at Bonaberi. Some port facilities were expanded notably at Bota and Tiko, while the Mamfe river harbor was created. Also, airstrips were constructed by Crop Culture (Aerial), Ltd., in the coastal vicinities of Bota, Idenau, Ekoni, Tiko, Lobe, Mbonge, Mukonye, Ndian, Tombel and Besongabong. These runways were used by the said company’s planes. The leading airliner was the Cameroon Air Transport, while the routes were managed by the Nigerian Airways Corporation. An inter-state air service was introduced after (re)unification, which led to the maintenance of the Tiko airstrip, the creation of the Bamenda airport in Bafu, and the rebranding of the Cameroon Air Transport Ltd. in 1962. Nonetheless, overtime, the above-mentioned wharves, sea ports and airfields were allowed to lapse into a state of disuse such that the West Cameroonians had to rely on the central administration to revamp them.

3.3 Development of Transport Infrastructure in French/East Cameroun

The French administrative authorities took concrete measures to maintain the existing transport and communication infrastructure in Cameroun and to develop new ones (Joneaux, 1970). In April 1946, the French National Assembly enacted a law establishing the Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Sociale des Territoire d'Outre-Mer or the Economic and Social Development Investment Fund (FIDES). The financing of the scheme was to be serviced by occasional grants-in-aid to colonies from the French national budget, and from long-term low-interest loans each territory received from the Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outre-Mer or the Central Fund for French Overseas Territories (CCFOM). The investment funds were used for bankrolling projects in four-year economic plans, the first of which concentrated on developing the transport infrastructure in each French overseas dependency. Priority was given to access roads from port cities such as Douala to railway termini like Nkongsamba and Yaounde. As early as 1927, road construction began with the first track to be paved being the motorway which passed through Mbanga and Loum, and went right to the boundary with the British Southern Cameroons. The Nkongsamba-Mbanga portion of this highway measuring some 85 kilometers, was successfully extended to Bonaberi on 25 September 1937. Thereafter, the French administration ordered the building of the Nkam-Bafang road. But, it was suspended as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War and resumed after the conflict in three major directions: the North lane, connected the major towns and traversed the port city of Douala through Bonaberi, Mbanga, Loum, Nkongsamba, Bafang, Bafoussam, Foumban, Banyo, Tibati and Ngaoundere to Garoua, Maroua and Fort Fourreau in North Cameroun. The tributary roads spanned from Loum to Kumba and Yabassi; Bafang to Nkondjok; Kompina to Dschang and Mbouda; Bandjoun through Bangante and Bafia to Yaounde; Bafoussam to Dschang; and Bafoussam through Mbouda to Bamenda. The Eastern line crossed Douala to Ndokama toward Yabassi; and a third motorway extended from Douala through Edea and Lolodorf to Yaounde, Bertoua-Boulai (towards Bouar and Bangui); with outlets linking Edea and Kribi; and form this seaside resort town to the capital city Yaounde. Being the main road axis, it served the purposes of motor transport and foot traffic.

To put things in perspective, the 1 805 meters-long Wouri Bridge was built, which joined the two main railway lines by 1958; many crossings built over rivers along the Ngaoundere-Maroua, Kribi-Edea, Kribi-Lolodorf, and Bafia-Eseka motorways, and on some 4 000 kilometers non classified road (Rapport, 1957). In addition, about 577 kilometers of new streets were tarred, 143 kilometers of highways rated as A; 40 kilometers of traffic lane ranked as B; 313 kilometers of tracks classified as C; and 98 kilometers of paths ordered as D. In total, the number of categorized roads increased from 6 416 kilometers, up from less than 4 000 in 1948. Many airfields were built with one upgraded from a class B to an A type aerodrome, 11 to class C, and 11 others to class D standards after 1950.

The thoroughfares from Limbe to Kumba, Ngaoundere to Garoua, Bafoussam to Bamenda, Douala to Bafoussam, Yaounde through Bafia to Bafoussam, and Belabo to Bertoua, were widened and excellently tarred after the adoption of a unitary system of government in 1972 (Ndouyou, 2022). Arguably, the most ambitious road project to be undertaken by Cameroon since independence was the Yaounde-Douala AutoRoute stretching over some 196 kilometers of territory. The initial phase of 60 kilometers between Yaounde and Bibodi, had already been constructed and opened for circulation on 31st December 2021. Upon completion, this controlled-access highway was to form an integral part of the trans-continental road network which transcended the country, connecting it to neighboring states in the Central African sub region and beyond. The first of these Trans African roads was the Lagos-Mombasa Line that extended from Ekok in Nigeria passing through Mamfe, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Tibati, Meidouyou in Cameroon, to the Central African Republic. The second passageway called the Coastal Line deviated from the first one at Bafoussam and spanned from Yaounde to Gabon, with the other continuing to the Republic of Congo. The third road axis started from Dakar in Senegal and passed through Maiduguri in Nigeria and the Northern towns of Cameroon to reach N'djamena in Chad. Cameroon's central location in this trans-frontier road network meant that, efforts made to improve on the existing transport infrastructure across West-central Africa, depended largely on the country's contribution in maintaining the linkages, which had the potential to profoundly influence its sub regional trade, given its proximity to the populous Federal Republic of Nigeria with a lucrative market.

Other construction works undertaken as part of the FIDES program, inter alia included: the renovation of the equipment of the Central Railway Line that had been completed in 1927, such that it stretched from Widimenge (around Eseka) up to Otele (near Mbalmayo) and finally reached Yaounde, as the Germans had envisioned (Neba, 1999). Christened the Trans Cameroon Rail Line, it was later rehabilitated and extended from Yaounde to Ngaoundere, between October 1964 and February 1974. Thereby effectively linking the Southern and Northern regions of the territory. Sectioned into Transcam I, spanning from Douala to Yaounde; and Transcam II, passing through Yaounde, Belabo to Ngaoundere. This main railway network covered a total distance of about 877 kilometers. By 1987, it had been realigned, and an express train service was introduced between the cities of Douala and Yaounde. It was used to transport groundnuts, cotton, cattle, hides and skins and other raw materials from the Northern regions to the Southern coastal port and cities, and in the reverse direction, cement, fertilizers, heavy building material, fuel and vehicles were conveyed towards the North through it.

Sea ports in Douala and Kribi were expanded and modernized, while the Garoua river haven was opened. With the major airports being those of Douala, Yaounde, Ngaoundere, Garoua, Maroua, Kribi and Foumban (Ngoh, 1979). This was accompanied by the licensing of over sixteen airline companies: Societe Nationale Air France; Union Aeromaritime des Transport Aériens (UAT); Societe des Transports Aériens Inter-continentaux (TAI); Societe Transat Atlantique Aériens (STA) and the Transports Aériens Camerounais, to name but a few. The two latter corporations cited above mostly operated domestic and inter-African flights. The desire to facilitate the evacuation of perishable and fragile goods like tropical fruits and meat to

local and international markets, stirred the use of air traffic which gathered momentum after 1952. For instance, about 80 to 100 tons of meat was airlifted monthly from the Ngaoundere aerodrome to the South of Cameroun and Gabon during this period. Meanwhile, with the advent of a unitary state as earlier indicated, the improvement on airport services throughout the national territory was ratcheted up. Specifically, the Douala and Garoua international airports were enlarged and modernized, and the Ngaoundere, Bertoua and Bamenda airfields were properly built and provided with facilities for all-weather landings and takeoffs.

A Road Fund was created in 1996 in order to implement the government policy on the transport sector, which was focused on a network of 27 000 kilometers (BTS Afrique, 2008). Between 2000 and 2008, many roads were earmarked for construction or rehabilitation. Amongst the stretches tarred or pending completion were the these: Nsimalen-Mbalmayo-Ebolowa-Ambam motorway; Bertoua-Garoua-Boulai axis; Melong-Dschang lane; Ambam-Aking track; Ambam-Kye-Ossi cross-border road; Ngaoundere-Toubo-Moundou motorway; Eseka-Lolodorf road; Bertoua-Bonis thoroughfare; Nyamboya-Banyo; Garoua-Boulai-Nandéké-Mbéré-Ngaoundere road axis; Mamfe-Ekok-Numba-Bachouo-Akagbe lane and Obala-Bertoua road. Meanwhile, the rehabilitated roads included the Yaounde-Ayos and Yaounde-Soa highways; Mutengene-Buea-Kumba road; Fouban-Tibati-Ngaoundere motorway. As expected, this was accompanied by the construction of many bridges such as those over the Ntem, Makabaye, Mungo, Gashiga rivers. The flyovers on the Wouri, Sanaga at Ebebda and the *pont de l'enfance* or the Childhood Bridge, were to be reinforced. Also, more overpasses were to be built on the Salak, Mezam, Nyong rivers. A second bridge over the Wouri was later commissioned on 21 December 2018. There were five marine terminals: Kole, Limboh, Kome, Ebome and Moudi, which handled the country's petroleum exports.

According to official statistics, there were a total of 77 589 kilometers of roads in Cameroon, of which 5 133 kilometers were tarred, 12 799 kilometers unpaved, and 59 657 normal road tracks by 2019 (WFP, 2019). The length of the national roads network linking the political capital Yaounde to all ten regional headquarters as well as neighboring countries, was 7 041 kilometers; regional roads connecting the divisional headquarters to the regional capital had a total length of 5 616 kilometers; divisional roads connecting the administrative districts to the head offices measure 8 075 kilometers; classified rural tracks or farm-to-market roads, stretched for about 12 843 kilometers; and non-classified rural roads managed by development companies or decentralized local collectivities, measured 16 100 kilometers. This gave the country a road density estimated at 7 kilometers for each 1 000 square kilometers. Table 1 provides statistics of the spatial varieties of the transport infrastructure development in the ten administrative regions of Cameroon in 2019.

Table 1. Spatial Differences of the Transport Infrastructure Development in Cameroon, 2019.

Regions	Surface Area in Square Kilometers	Population in Size	Number of Tarred Roads	Number of Prioritized Earth Roads	Number of Non-prioritized Earth Roads	Number of Prioritized Rural Roads	Number of Non-prioritized Rural Roads	Total Number of Roads
Adamawa	64 000	700 000	411	1 350	651	605	1 208	4 255
Centre	69 000	2 400 000	912	1 555	1 532	3 725	3 303	11 036
East	110 000	750 000	346	1 590	1 455	868	715	4 974
Far North	34 000	2 650 000	589	1 011	1 088	1 195	1 501	5 384
North	66 000	1 200 000	645	1 044	1 084	867	1 147	4 787
Littoral	20 000	2 150 000	478	773	302	708	718	2 979
Northwest	16 000	1 800 000	205	841	67	1 231	2 160	4 504
Southwest	25 000	1 200 000	260	942	173	740	876	2 991
West	13 000	1 950 000	459	983	355	1 473	1 121	4 391
South	47 000	520 000	574	1 512	735	698	982	4 501
Total	466 000	15 292 000	4 918	11 601	7 442	12 110	13 731	49 802

Source: WFP "Cameroon Road Network", 8 December 2019, Logistics Capacity Assessment (LCA), N° 2.3. Available on the website: <https://www.dlca.logcluster.org>, accessed on 1 September 2022.

From the figures presented on Table 1, the Northwest and Southwest had the least tarred roads by 2019. That was 205 and 260 motorways respectively. These Anglophone regions also featured among those with the minimum number of prioritized earth and rural motorways in the country in the said year. The Northwest had 841 categorized low-cost roads and 1 231 selected rural tracks, while the Southwest had 942 ranked untarred lanes and 740 rated rural tracks. This placed both regions just slightly above the Littoral with 773 ordered unsurfaced motorways and 708 rural roads of significance, and almost at the same level with the West which had 983 classified unpaved lanes of national importance and 1 473 graded rural paths. However, a cross section of the Francophone regions had more prioritized dirt roads compared to the selected rural tracks. Specifically, the Adamawa had 1350 classified bumpy roads and simply 605 rural tracks of importance, the East had 1 590 ranked earth ways and merely 868 listed rural paths, the North had 1 044 categorized dry-weather roads and 867 shortlisted rural alleys, and the South had 1 512 dirt thoroughfares of prominence and only 698 arranged rural roads. This was clear evidence that the government had more interest in improving the transport infrastructure in the Francophone part of the country. In regard to the non-prioritized roads, it can be seen on the table that, the Northwest had 67 unranked earth lanes but this was overshadowed by the 2 160 ungraded rural tracks in the region, while, the Southwest had 173 non-prioritized rough highways and 876 rural roads of no standing. The East and the littoral each had 715 and 718 non-prioritized rural roads

correspondingly, such that they could be singled out as the only Francophone regions trailing the South West in the number of local roads of national interest. Hence, although the Northwest and Southwest regions had the minimum number of non-prioritized earth tracks, the transport infrastructure in these zones was still a problem as many road projects were still to be realized. Taking everything into account, the sidelining of the English-speaking regions in the provision of better transport facilities becomes apparent given that, the Northwest with a surface area of 16 000 square kilometers, and the Southwest covering 25 000 square kilometers; were each larger in size than the West region which covered an area of 13 000 square kilometers. There was also no justification for fewer roads to be constructed in these two Anglophone regions judging from their population sizes. This was because the Northwest had 1 800 000 people and the Southwest was home to 1 200 000 persons. Thus, the number of inhabitants in these zones considered independently, surpassed those in say the Adamawa with 700 000 people, East with 750 000 persons and the South with some 520 000 residents. In comparison therefore, French Cameroun ended up with more transport infrastructure than the British sector, and this disparity impacted on the relations between the two political entities.

4. Impact of Imbalanced Development of Transport Infrastructure on the Political Evolution of Anglo-French Cameroons

French investment through the FIDES was considered to create structural imbalance within the economy of Cameroun (Abangma, 2003). This was owing to the fact that, despite the frequent reference to the *Mise en valeur*, the Colons or expatriates were above all concerned with the *Croissant fertile* or Fertile Crescent within which were concentrated French colonial interests, and not the development of the Trust territory into a viable economic unit. This zone was shaped in the form of a semi-circle with radius of 300 to 350 kilometers from Douala and covering one-tenth of the territory. It had the highest concentration of agro-industrial complexes and infrastructural investments as it was served by railroad and other transport facilities for the exportation of cash crops, and the importation of industrial products. By extension, localities within the *Croissant fertile* were favored in terms of the delivery of social amenities like pipe borne water, education and health care. Besides, the FIDES program was perceived by Camerounians to have been designed to meet French colonial interests. It was viewed as a means of employing Cameroun financial resources as investment capital for French companies, so as to reinforce the territory's subordinate position with the metropole. Little wonder that the aforementioned funding scheme was widely criticized for having failed in many development endeavors it financed.

Even French scholars like the Agronomist and Sociologist René Dumont disapproved of the program (Dumont, 2012). He opines that:

“Within the framework of FIDES very large sums were granted to French-speaking Africa. In face of immense needs, however, they seemed quite modest. The aid could in fact have been increased many times without a corresponding tax pressure, had France had the courage politically to decolonize more rapidly. Forty-six percent of the FIDES grants, particularly in the first four-year plan, were used to build roads, ports and airports. These were indispensable to open up the countries, but could have been achieved at less cost.”¹

Consequently, the disproportionate investments particularly in the transport sector in the port city of Douala and its vicinities, culminated in not only being a source of discontent at all levels of the Camerounian society, but also made the French an obvious target for nationalists, who had had a tradition of anti-colonialism since German Protectorate period.

The British neglect of the transport infrastructure in the Southern Cameroons impacted on her struggle for independence (Nfi, 2013). This observation is made on grounds that, the Republic of Cameroun seemingly pledged to assist in the socio-economic development of the Southern Cameroons, in order to entice the local inhabitants of the latter Trust territory, to opt to have independence by (re)unification. This assertion is buttressed by the fact that, prior to the 11 February 1961 UN organized Plebiscite, that was to decide on the political destiny of the British Southern Cameroons, the hierarchy of the pro-(re)unification Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), working in collaboration with some Camerounian authorities, dispatched equipment on 19 March 1960 for the construction of the Kumba-Mamfe road. These machineries that were sent to Kumba included one M.G. 12 grader, one soil elevator, one mobile workshop and trailer, one bitumen preheater, one broom drag, one pneumatic tyred tractor and a bitumen distributor.

Worthy of note is the fact that, ever since the (re)unification of British and French Cameroons, the Anglophone Camerounians have been yearning for an improvement on their transport infrastructure (Nsom, 2022). This point of view is shared by the Journalist, Yerima Kini Nsom, who writes: “[...] Given that one of the main grievances of the former Southern Camerounians was the poor road infrastructure, one could not have imagined that the status quo would still be in place five years after the beginning of the [Anglophone] crisis.”

The Archbishop of the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province, His Grace Andrew Fuanya Nkea, acknowledged the poor road network in his pastoral area, which encompassed the whole of the former British Southern Cameroons (Mughe, 2022). This was obvious during the requiem mass of the mother of Minister Paul Atanga Nji of Territorial Administration, on 23 August 2022, when the prelate seized the opportunity to present the gloomy situation of the transport infrastructure in the regional

¹ “Des sommes importantes furent ainsi attribuées à l’Afrique “francophone” dans le cadre de ce FIDES. Cependant, face à l’immensité des besoins, celles-ci restèrent modestes. En effet, les possibilités d’attribution auraient pu être multipliées, sans accroître la pression fiscale, avec le courage politique d’une plus rapide décolonisation. 46 % de ces ressources furent consacrés, surtout dans le premier plan quadriennal, à bâtir l’infrastructure de ports, de routes et d’aérodromes. Ce travail de désenclavement, indispensable, il eût été souvent possible de la réaliser à moindres frais.” (Dumont, 2012)

headquarters Bamenda and elsewhere. In an emotional appeal, he literally pleaded with the member of government to channel to President Paul Biya, the true picture of the deplorable state of roads in the area. Evidence of this casualness vis-à-vis the development of the transport network in Anglophone Cameroon by the state abounded.

Prominent amongst the many unfinished projects was the Limbe (formerly Victoria) Deep Sea Port, whose construction was still pending decades after it was first talked about (Ngoh, 1996). The Francophone dominated administration had repeatedly ignored the recommendations of specialists who had all identified the said natural harbor as a profitable alternative to the Douala Autonomous Sea Port at Bonaberi, whose yearly cost of dredging made it less economical for usage. These studies were carried out at different intervals by a World Bank expert and the Société Générale d'Exportation Industrielles (SOGEI), working in synergy with a Stanford Research Team respectively, with all their reports corroborating the other.

It took about two decades of complaining by some West Cameroonians, for the state to start thinking of developing the Limbe Deep Sea Port (Kah, 2021). Then, there was first, the signing of the Presidential Decree N° 99/133 of June 1999, establishing the Autonomous Port of Limbe, and in 2009, feasibility studies were completed. Subsequently, on 1st November 2013, the government signed an agreement with a Cameroon-Korean Consortium called Limbe Port Development Corporation for the construction of the anchorage estimated at over 300 billion Francs CFA, to be delivered in 2018. The government seemed to be in a dilemma as concerns the site to be chosen to host the aforementioned seaport, as it had been changed several times. Initially, it was at Ngeme but later changed to Isokolo in 2013 and back to Ngeme in 2016 and of recent, it was again decided that the anchorage should include those of Idenau and Tiko. Worse still, the planned modernization of the port announced in 1999 did not come to fruition, as the construction of the dock was simply overlooked or politicized. Even with this renewed commitment by the authorities, the primary aim was to use it purposely for the shipment of tropical fruits from the Mounjo division, as was alleged. To lend credence to this suspicion by many Anglophones, the government instead prioritized the creation of the Kribi Industrial Port in the Francophone part of the country, which was practically stamped. However, the lost hopes on the fate of the said harbor were finally rekindled when the President of the Republic signed two decrees, on 5 May 2020, reorganizing and approving its status. Reacting to the news of the eminent building of the dock, the Fako Chiefs' Conference led by His Royal Highness Richard Ndiaye Kombe, during a gathering in the Limbe City Hall in Down Beach, saw the gesture as a positive step to implement the decision of recreating the port which they had been clamoring for so long.

A recent ministerial order suspending all land transaction on the Limbe Deep Sea Port sites of Down Beach, Bota, Ngeme, Cape Limboh, Isongo, Idenau and Tiko, so as to widen it to include those of Idenau and Tiko, and make it large enough, did not still go down well in the Anglophone community (Ehabe, 2022). This was because many people wished to see the implementation of the 1976 project of the port in question, presented during the 33rd anniversary celebration of the CDC. Given that, this other plan envisaged a much bigger harbor and one of its kind in Africa, with countries as far as Zambia in the Southern part of the continent willing to invest in it. In fact, the feasibility proposal then, provided for the building of a barrage from Man-o-War Bay all the way to Isokolo and Ngeme that was to be filled with laterite, making it a much larger port. Which would have made it possible for the railroad to pass through Limbe to link the Congo and all the way to Zambia.

The Tiko wharf was another transport infrastructure of the olden days whose continued existence was shrouded in uncertainty (Bisong, 2020). Reason being that, the Special Amphibious Battalion which had anchored there and used it as a logistic base to do shipment to and from Bakassi during the crisis over the peninsula in the 1980s, recently, was demanding government to carve out seventeen hectares of its land, for the creation of a permanent military base. This was under the pretext that it would enable the army to better guard Cameroon's maritime border. However, the officials of the port frantically held that, if the request was granted, then the anchorage will be left with nothing more than two hectares of land which will be insignificant for its sustainability. Equally, pundits were of the opinion that such a move would only describe how well the marginalization of Anglophone Cameroon was being perfected, as the Tiko harbor was just to disappear like its airport that had gone into oblivion and other giant development projects of the yesteryears, which Southern Cameroonians remember with nostalgia.

It should be recalled that, by 2013, the once busy Tiko airport indicated above was virtually non-existent which had prompted the Minister of Transport to pledge to rehabilitate it, during a two day visit to the Southwest region from 6 to 7 March that year (Fon, 2022). But still, no practical steps were taken to revamp the airstrip. Subsequently, on 30 August 2022, the Minister again announced the refurbishment of the said runway alongside those of Bertoua and Kribi in the East and South regions respectively. It was understood that the ministry was to ensure the management of the project in relation to its planned works, and proceed to the signing of contracts with pre-selected companies without delay. The plan was in line with the implementation of the airport infrastructure modernization program initiated as a prelude to the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2012. Being part of the operational application of the integrated multi-modal transport strategy in Cameroon. The government intended to improve air transport equipment and to permit all ten administrative regions in the country to have at least one functioning aerodrome.

There was also the familiar Bamenda Ring-Road reconstruction project, announced by the President of the Republic in 1983, following his ascension to power, but which had not materialized (Nsom, 2009). This was regardless of the fact that the issue had been picked up and debated upon during almost every budgetary session at the National Assembly. At one time, the Members of Parliament of the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) party, took the then Prime Minister, Chief Ephraim Inoni, to task about the road, who only confirmed a partial tarring of it. Later in 2008, the nine parliamentarians from the Northwest expressed their disappointment that the Ring-Road was not included in the investment budget for the coming year. This prompted them to write a strongly worded memorandum to the President of the Republic, reminding him of the promise

he made over twenty seven years ago about constructing the road in question. In which case, it was rumored that the Head of State had given firm instructions for the tarring of some additional 40 kilometers of the highway. But, barely a year after, the Public Works Minister Bernard Messengue Avom, while on an official mission to China in early August 2009, told the government which was funding a number of road construction projects in Cameroon that the Bamenda-Ring Road was not yet a priority. Instead, it was alleged that the Minister named roads in the Centre, South and East regions, as projects of top importance for the government. This triggered an angry reaction from the Secretary General of the SDF Dr. Mrs. Elizabeth Tamajong, who pointed out that it was the greatest provocation against the people of the Northwest region and called on the senior state official to apologize. Arguing that, he might leave the impression that the government in place hated the Northwesterners and was not ready to carry out development projects for the interest of the people. Subsequently, the African Development Bank (ADB) provided a loan of over 11 billion Francs CFA in November 2018 for the rehabilitation of a portion of the road. Thereafter, in 2021, the government promised to commence work on the second phase of the motorway. Yet, nothing concrete was said about the venture even though the state had already commissioned and made tenders for it, and had also contracted a loan of 1.06 billion Francs CFA again with the ADB, for its execution.

Some Southern Cameroonians were of the opinion that the construction of the Babadjou-Bamenda highway that linked the largest city in Anglophone Cameroon with the neighbouring West region had been politicized and cloaked in corruption like the other projects already discussed (Ashu, 2021). They maintained that just like the Bamenda Ring-Road plan, the Babadjou-Bamenda motorway, whose construction had been on since 2017, thanks to a 113 billion Francs CFA subvention from the World Bank, was another white elephant project of the new deal government that thrived in corruption. Whenever the completion of the road was expected, officials came up with flimsy excuses. It was either they complained of the rains or of insecurity. As a result, the bad state of the road was a constant source of anger and vexation to many Anglophones. On one occasion, the Chairman of the SDF, Ni John Fru Ndi, stormed the dilapidated highway and sent away workers at the tollgate precisely at the border locality of Matazem in 2015. The local inhabitants wondered aloud why the Cameroon's Military Engineering Corps had not been called in to construct the road, as it had done in the Northern part of the country in the midst of continuous attacks from the terrorist group Boko Haram. Consequently, the authorities were accused for being interested only in erecting symbols of occupation like administrative structures in the former British Southern Cameroons, a clear indication that there were two Cameroons: one deserving of development and the other condemned to be occupied and conquered.

5. Conclusion

In retrospect, the European colonialists operating in Cameroon just like in other sub-Saharan African territories, were guided essentially by their capitalist interests in their attempt to develop the transport infrastructure in these areas. This explains why most of the roads and railway lines they constructed cut across the African continent longitudinally, from North to South, linking agro-industrial zones to the coastal ports and not transversally, from East to West, to connect local communities. This has led to disparity in transport infrastructure, creating a situation which the post-independent governments have had to grapple with as they strive to ensure some level of balanced development. As a way forward, ensuring a more equitable development of the transport system in both former British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon will not only help in fostering socio-economic development especially in the predominantly Anglophone part of the country, lacking in infrastructure, but will also go a long way to consolidate the (re)unification bond between the two states contracted in 1961. Equally, it will make the internal policy options of national unity and national integration become a reality. For there is a famous adage that "Where a road passes, development follows."

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