

Agata Maria Karbowska

Jagiellonian University

 0000000162618584

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Review: Jarosław Różański, *The Federal Republic of Ambazonia: In Search of an English-language Political and Cultural Identity for the People of Cameroon* [*Republika Federalna Ambazonii: Poszukiwanie tożsamości kulturowej i politycznej angielskojęzycznych mieszkańców Kamerunu*], Warsaw 2023: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 259 pp.

The last decade has witnessed growing scholarly interest in «unresolved nation-state issues» in Africa, particularly secessionist movements, hybrid sovereignties, and postcolonial struggles for cultural recognition. In this context, Jarosław Różański's *Federal Republic of Ambazonia* represents one of the most comprehensive Polish-language monographs on the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon and the sociocultural processes underlying the imagined Ambazonia polity. The book is distinguished by its interdisciplinary approach, combining history, ethnography, missionary studies, and conflict analysis. Through this multi-layered perspective, Różański offers a nuanced account of how colonial legacies, cultural identities, and political resentments converged to create one of Africa's longest-running conflicts.

A key strength of the book is its insistence that Cameroon's Anglophone identity cannot be viewed solely through the lens of 20th century colonial partition or the federation of 1961. The introduction clearly states that the book will examine the Anglophone problem in Cameroon, the cultural and political identity of Anglophone communities, and the emergence of "Ambazonia" as a concept. This appears in the author's abstract and in Section 1.2: "Issues and content of this work," where the author frames the problem and scope. The book operates within a theoretical framework that posits identity as historically constructed, drawing on perspectives such as the work of Achille Mbembe (1996), Piet Konings, and Francis. B. Nyamnjoh (2003) on identity in Cameroon, and an African political anthropology that rejects static tribal models. The central theoretical premise is that Anglophone identity in Cameroon is the product of intersecting historical forces, not simply

a colonial administrative artifact. Róžański demonstrates that British and French colonialisms created divergent political cultures, linguistic and educational differences deepened this division, and colonial boundaries and models of governance laid the foundations for contemporary identity conflict. The book emphasizes the structural effects of colonial rule, although the author does not explicitly refer to postcolonial theorists. Instead, he demonstrates these dynamics through historical evidence. An analysis of Cameroon after 1972 (the unitarianism of Amhadou Ahidjo and later Paul Biya) suggests a hidden application of the core-periphery theory (Fogui, 1990; Wunsch, and Olowu 1990). Róžański shows how centralisation weakened federal guarantees, English-speaking regions were systematically marginalised, and linguistic and legal pluralism was suppressed by a unified state policy. This situates Ambazonian separatism within a broader African pattern of tensions related to postcolonial state-building. A significant observation is that separatist nationalism in Ambazonia is rooted not so much in ethnic homogeneity as in a shared cultural and linguistic experience, reinforced by missionary education, an English-language legal culture, Protestant institutional traditions, and a collective memory of marginalisation. This is consistent with theories of cultural nationalism, in which culture, not ethnicity, shapes political mobilisation. Furthermore, religion is viewed here as a sociopolitical actor. Drawing on church documents and missionary history, the author implicitly adopts a theory of religious institutions as mediators of identity and conflict, demonstrating the church's role in articulating grievances, shaping education and literacy, and providing a political framework for community mobilization.

In the very first chapter, the author returns to the region's deep history, describing the mosaic of pre-colonial societies, their economic systems, religious practices, and intergroup dynamics. This contextualization, rarely found in most English-language, policy-oriented analyses, serves two functions. First, it disrupts simplistic narratives that treat Anglophone identity as an artificial colonial construct. Second, it demonstrates that the region's cultural pluralism existed long before the emergence of European powers, creating a complex foundation on which later political identities were built. This longitudinal perspective is further developed in the chapters devoted to early European engagement in Amba Bay (1832–1887). Róžański reconstructs the interplay between British traders, Jamaican Baptist missionaries, and coastal communities, emphasizing the profound impact of missionary networks, literacy, and Christianization on the emerging cultural identity of the region's inhabitants. Particularly interesting is his analysis of the role of Jamaican missionaries in shaping a proto-Anglophone consciousness – a topic often overlooked in mainstream studies, which prioritize British administrative structures over religious and diasporic entities.

The author's historical chapters effectively demonstrate that the roots of the Anglophone – Francophone division lie not only in the German, British, and French colonial periods but also in precolonial social dynamics and early contacts with the Atlantic world. This allows the reader to appreciate Ambazonian identity as both historically grounded and constantly reinterpreted. The chapters on German rule (1887–1914), the interwar mandates, and the period of UN trusteeship after 1945 provide a meticulously documented account of the region's geopolitical transformations. Róžański utilizes an extensive bibliography – drawing on French, English, and German archival sources, as well as missionary documents – to describe how successive colonial regimes built competing administrative cultures and institutional infrastructures.

A detailed analysis of the 1961 plebiscite, the subsequent establishment of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, and the centralisation reforms under Presidents Ahidjo and Biya (1961–1982) constitutes one of the book's most important intellectual contributions. Róžański convincingly argues that the erosion of federal autonomy, the francophoneisation of education and law, and the absorption of Anglophone institutions into centralised state structures contributed to widespread political disillusionment. While these processes are familiar to readers of Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, Róžański's work complements the literature by citing less frequently discussed Polish missionary perspectives and observations, often unavailable in English-language discourse. His attention to the internal diversity of Anglophone political movements is particularly noteworthy. The author avoids homogenising “Anglophones” as a single bloc, instead mapping the rivalry between federalists, unionists, and separatists, as well as the divergent agendas of elites and grassroots initiatives. This is consistent with recent historiography, which emphasizes the complexity of regional political cultures rather than assuming ethnic or linguistic unity. The second part of the book describes the dramatic escalation of the Anglophone crisis in 2016 and 2017. Róžański reconstructs the sequence of protests, school boycotts, lawyers' strikes, rejection of dialogue initiatives, and the eventual proclamation of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia in October 2017. What distinguishes this account from journalistic or NGO reports is the author's careful portrayal of competing separatist leadership structures, including the Transitional Government, the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), and various armed groups such as the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF). Crucially, Róžański does not romanticise the separatist project. His analysis highlights the fragmentation, rivalry, and crises of legitimacy that plague Ambazonia's leadership. He documents how the imprisonment of Sisiku Ayuka Tabe and the subsequent power struggle with Samuel Sako weakened the movement's cohesion, while the growth of militia groups intensified cycles of violence,

retaliation, and civilian suffering. The description of the violence (attacks on schools, the destruction of villages, sexual assaults on women, kidnappings, and intimidation of religious communities) is detailed yet balanced. Drawing on reports from the Catholic Church, foreign missions, and humanitarian organizations, Róžański paints a grim picture of social disintegration and widespread human rights violations.

Perhaps the most conceptually engaging section of the monograph is Róžański's reflection on Ambazonia as a project of cultural memory and political imagination. In a particularly insightful passage, the author argues that while no "Ambazonian people" have ever existed as a self-identifying ethnocultural group, the contemporary movement deliberately constructs an identity by drawing on scattered elements of historical memory – such as the encounters at Ambas Bay in the 19th century and the short-lived federation of 1961–1972. This draws on Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" but grounds in the specificity of Cameroon's multilingual and multiethnic landscape. Róžański's approach avoids the pitfalls of both nationalist romanticism and dismissive realism. The author neither endorses Ambazonian separatism nor reduces it to a purely manipulative, political fabrication. Rather, it treats it as an emerging identity with socio-cultural roots – shaped by memories of colonialism, grievances over marginalization, and aspirations for recognition.

The Federal Republic of Ambazonia represents the most comprehensive Polish-language study of Ambazonia to date, filling a gap in Central European scholarship on this conflict. By positioning Róžański with Harry Akoh's recently published volume (2024), we see how descriptive historical reconstruction (Róžański) and normative/theoretical pluralism (Akoh) can usefully interact: the former provides chronology and sources; the latter expands the diasporic, ethical, and transnational dimensions that are increasingly important for understanding Ambazonia's future. The emphasis on cultural and religious dimensions expands the English-language political science literature, reminding readers of the centrality of missionary history and interreligious dynamics in shaping contemporary identities. The historical narrative of Anglophone identity challenges reductionist narratives, encouraging comparative reflection with other African separatist movements such as South Sudan, Somaliland, and Biafra. The included map of separatist factions contributes to understanding how digital diasporas, exile politics, and factionalisation shape contemporary uprisings. The documentation of violence against civilians constitutes a crucial human rights record and underscores the urgent need to address what has become one of the most neglected humanitarian crises in Africa.

Despite its many strengths, the monograph leaves some areas open for further exploration: the internal complexities of Anglophone socioeconomic stratification (urban/rural divides, elite formation, gender dynamics) receive limited attention. The role of digital media in shaping Ambazonian identity could be explored more broadly, given the movement's reliance on online mobilization. The book references several historical periods, including the precolonial era, German colonisation, British/French mandates, the post-1961 reunification period the protests and conflict of 2016/2017. But the introduction does not formulate a single, explicit time frame of analysis; rather, the periodisation becomes clear through the chapter outline. The introduction does not list formal research questions. However, it implicitly raises guiding questions, such as: Why did the Anglophone conflict emerge? How did Anglophone identity develop historically? These are implied rather than formulated as academic research questions. The author refers to Erik Erikson's works on self-identity and the stages of identity distinguished by him, but he is not included in the bibliography.

Jarosław Róžański's book, *The Federal Republic of Ambazonia*, is a significant contribution to the study of African cultural and political identities. Combining deep historical context, ethnographic sensitivity, and insightful political analysis, it offers a comprehensive account of how English-speaking Cameroon became the site of a powerful and tragic struggle for recognition, memory, and sovereignty. For scholars of culture and society, particularly those interested in postcolonial statehood, identity construction, and conflict transformation, this book provides both an invaluable resource and a compelling interpretive framework. This work deserves the attention of readers beyond Polish African studies circles and should be seen as a Polish contribution to interdisciplinary research on contemporary African crises.

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