

**INSIGHTS INTO FRANCOPHONE CAMEROONIANS' EXPERIENCES IN
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES AND MISSION IN
BAMENDA, CAMEROON**

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ABSTRACT: *This article is an investigation into the processes behind Cameroon Francophone's involvement in historical churches in Bamenda to ultimately analyse how these churches aid migrants' integration into the host society. Attributing the presence of Francophone Christian communities in Bamenda to internal immigration forces, the paper shows how Francophone Cameroonians depend on religion to cope with the difficulties of living in a Bamenda society that is foreign to them. Based largely on archival and oral sources, the paper examines the issues related to migrants' integration in churches in Bamenda as well as the development of immigrant congregations of some historical Francophone churches in the host society. The paper submits that the insensitivity of host historical churches in Bamenda to migrants' participation difficulties occasioned the development of migrant-led churches which serve as loci for identity and as avenues for adapting into the socio-religious context of the host society.*

KEYWORDS: Bamenda, Churches, Migration, Francophone Cameroonians, Migrant-Led Churches, Integration, National Unity.

INTRODUCTION

The movement of people from one region of Cameroon to another has gradually intensified since 1961 when the country was crafted from colonial ruins. The presence of Cameroonians from the eight French-speaking regions of Cameroon in the city of Bamenda, the biggest town in the English-speaking region, is predicated on the internal migration phenomenon. Since the crafting of a reunified Cameroon into a federation that comprised the two former Trust territories of British and French Cameroons, migration of Cameroonians from Francophone to Anglophone Cameroons and vice versa has grown. The possible meanings of the concepts, "Francophones" and "Anglophones" in the Cameroonian context need to be clarified before we proceed. In recent years, both concepts have received widely different interpretations from Cameroonian scholars. According to Nkwi (2004), Anglophones are indigenous Cameroonians whose first foreign and European culture is Anglo-Saxon while Francophones are indigenous Cameroonians with a Gaullic culture. Nfi (2014: 122) has criticized this definition, arguing that it misleadingly limits the Anglophone and Francophone to colonially-inherited cultural and linguistic identities. In Nfi's thinking, the cultural and linguistic Anglophones of Nkwi will include Anglophones from French Cameroon ancestry who migrated and settled in the British-administered Southern Cameroons before and after the 1961 reunification. According to Ndobegang (2009), an Anglophone is someone whose ancestry is Southern Cameroonian, while a Francophone is someone with a French Cameroon ancestry. Bobda (2001) corroborates this thinking, observing that the meaning of Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon has an ethnic connotation. It emerges from the

thoughts of Nfi, Ndobegang, and Bobda that the linguistic meaning given to both concepts is a mismatch for the Cameroonian context.

This study builds on these definitions to present Anglophones and Francophones as Cameroonians having ancestral origins and ethnic bases traced to the former British territory of the Southern Cameroons and the former French-administered Cameroon respectively, whether or not they speak English and French. British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon were carved out from the former German protectorate of Cameroon following its partition in 1916 by Britain and France during the First World War. From 1922 to 1960/61, these territories were successively governed on behalf of the League of Nations and United Nations by both colonial powers. In October 1961, Southern Cameroons reunified with French Cameroon (which had been renamed at independence in 1960 as *La République du Cameroun*) to constitute the modern Cameroon state (Nghoh 2001). The latter, today, comprises Anglophone and Francophone zones, with inter-migration between the two zones common.

This internal migration produces immigrant communities, with resultant social cohesion and integration challenges in host communities. Given the centrality of religion in the life of Africans, described by Mbiti (1975) as people who are notoriously religious, migrants from Francophone Cameroon had to rely on religion to cope with existential realities and challenges of living in Bamenda. Christians who undergo these complex forms of migration represent three denominational Christian groups – Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals. They have often brought with them these brands of Christianity, striving to maintain them as religious identity traits. This has often resulted in an encounter between the Christianity of the host society and that of the immigrant population.

While these migrants initially chose to attend historical churches in Bamenda, most of these churches were unable to facilitate their integration. This failure by some churches to act as agents and places of integration for migrants was frustrating to some of these Francophone Cameroonians. Some migrants constantly changed worship places as the first encounters often yielded the need to leave the church. Other migrants were well received upon arrival in some congregations and they resolved to stay. Generally, migrants looked for a church having semblance with the church in their place of origin. Most Christian migrants moved from one congregation to another within the brand of Christianity to which they initially belonged, while a few defected from one brand to another. In the last three decades, some of the migrants have terminated membership in historical churches of the host community, preferring to identify, organize, and reconstruct the Christianity they moved with both for themselves and their hosts. This response to integration challenges has given birth to branches of Francophone Cameroonian churches in Bamenda in the example of *Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun* (EEC) and Francophone congregations of the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC).

These immigrant congregations were initially established for Francophone migrants. In recent years, these Francophone Cameroonians in Bamenda are assuming responsibility for the Great Commission by reaching out to members of the host town and migrants from elsewhere. Although the congregations are predominantly Francophone in membership, adherents from Anglophone background are present. The presence of these congregations established by migrants as extensions of churches back home is changing the Christian configuration of the town of Bamenda. This is having an imprint on national integration as Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians now attend the same churches where they are

singing the Lord's song in a united voice. This study therefore raises the problem of integration among Francophone migrants in Bamenda from the perspective of the Christian religion. The main issue is whether religion is a constraint or opportunity for migrants' integration into the Bamenda urban space.

A brief excursion into the existing scholarship on migrants' religious experiences in host communities is important for coming to grips with the thesis and contributions of this article to immigrants' role in the Great Commission task. There is a unanimous view in the literature on the centrality of migration in the development and sustenance of immigrant congregations in host societies (Adogame 2013; Ludwig & Asamoah-Gyadu 2011; Wandusim 2015; Passarelli 2010). These scholars agree that migrants carry their religious traits to host communities as a means of staying connected with home. In his research, Adogame (2013) has heralded the thesis that migrants depend on religion to cope with the difficulties of living in a host society that is foreign to them. Ludwig & Asamoah-Gyadu (2011: 146) note particularly that religion eases migrants' adaptation to new environments. These studies adopt migration as framework for analyzing the integration of immigrant Christians in host communities.

The relationship between migration and conversion to Christianity has been affirmed by several studies. Wan (2003), for example, reported that migration is an opportunity for mission due to the likelihood of migrants' conversion to Christianity in their new societies. Though migrants move with their religious traits, the challenges in the host community may cause them to heed to a particular Christian evangelical message, as Roof and Manning (1994) pointed out in a study in Hong Kong which found that mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Filipina domestic workers convert to charismatic Christianity. This can be likened to the high rate at which mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Christian Francophones in Bamenda defect to Pentecostal churches. Hanciles (2008: 379) observes that "every Christian migrant is a potential missionary", thus giving credence to the new diaspora missiology concept heralded in recent years (Chandler and Tereso 2014: 3; Wan 2011: 138). These scholars present the migration of Christians as an avenue for the evangelistic dimension of mission.

Little or no scholarly attention has been given to what immigrants from Francophone Cameroon are doing religiously in the town of Bamenda and broadly in Anglophone Cameroon. This is a largely unexplored terrain in Cameroonian mission historiography, with the exception of a few pioneering studies by Ejedepang-Koge (2006) which examined migrants' role in the expansion of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) from Anglophone to Francophone Cameroon, and that of Dze-Ngwa (2006) which analyzed the travails of Christian Anglophones in Yaounde as hindrances to national integration. So far, no such study has been conducted in Anglophone Cameroon which is host to thousands of Christian Francophones. The town of Bamenda whose genesis and urbanization are intertwined with European colonialism and ensuing pull forces of migration can be described as a centre of Christianity. It was at the centre of missionary Christianity and presently hosts historical churches (Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian) and hundreds of Pentecostal churches. To this should be added the thousands of Christian migrants from Francophone Cameroon, Nigeria, and from other localities in the two English-speaking regions. An important religious trend in Bamenda is also Islam, the adherents of which are estimated in thousands. This corroborates the literature on diaspora religious communities which has established the importance of religion for immigrant communities.

But available literature reveals that internal migration is a marginal object of study in Cameroon. The dialectic between internal migration and religion's place in migrants' integration in host communities across Cameroon is either missed or overlooked in the literature. The development of immigrant religious communities, especially migrant-led congregations is yet to receive the attention of religion scholars. The irrefutable reality is that internal migration has occurred in Cameroon, taking thousands of Francophones into towns in the Anglophone zone. Their integration into these host cities is largely anchored on religion. Many of such Francophones have settled in Bamenda, making the town ripe for the observation and study of religion's role in integration. So, this paper seeks to demonstrate why and how Francophone migrants rely on the Christian faith tradition to ease their integration into the Bamenda urban space.

Contextualizing the Presence of Christian Francophones in Bamenda

The heavy presence of Francophone Cameroonians in Anglophone Cameroon is predicated on population mobility which, as Adagome (2013: 494) argues, "serves as a viable instrument of religious and cultural expansion, transmission and renegotiation." Such demographic shifts which are underpinned by globalization are recurrent in Cameroon and are tied closely to the historical development of the country since pre-colonial times. Cameroon is known for its long history of migration within and beyond the territory. The mobility, encounter and exchange between ethnic communities of the would-be Cameroon predate German annexation and the 1916 partition of the territory into British and French Cameroons (Fanso 1989). Contacts between polities across German Cameroon were constant throughout German imperial rule, causing some scholars to argue that there was an entrenched Cameroonian identity before the reconfiguration of the territory into Anglo-French spheres in 1916 (Ngoh 2001; Fanso 1989). British and French presence in separate portions of Cameroon from 1916 to the 1960s served as a catalyst for the movement of Cameroonians from the French to the English zone and vice versa. Colonial situations in French Cameroon such as forced labour policies, indigenat, land expropriation, the brutal suppression of nationalist tendencies, and the independence war launched by the *Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC)* in the 1950s brought French Cameroonians at varied times to various parts of British Cameroon (Nfi 2016). Some of these movements were voluntary as these people were attracted by economic opportunities in the fields of commerce and agriculture. The policing of the international boundary between the two Cameroons by Anglo-French border agents lacked the capacity to stop such population mobility. In a study on smuggling and contraband trade across this boundary, Nfi (2011: 176) stresses that Cameroonians' resistance of border controls favoured the movement of traders from French Cameroon into the Southern Cameroons.

This French Cameroonian diaspora in British Southern Cameroons, as Nfi notes, made conscious efforts in support of the reunification of the two Cameroons. On October 1, 1961 Southern Cameroons joined the former French Cameroon to constitute the Federal Republic of Cameroon with two federated states, West and East Cameroons.¹ West Cameroon represented the former Southern Cameroons while East Cameroon stood for the former French Cameroons. From this moment, colonial restrictions to movements to and from the two parts of Cameroon were lifted. This increased physical contact between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroons, as there was a surge in the frequency of movement to the Anglophone zone. The replacement of the federal structure with a unitary system in 1972 saw the posting of many Francophone civil servants (teachers, administrators, engineers, armed

forces, engineers, nurses, medical doctors, etc.) to towns across Anglophone Cameroon. The town of Bamenda, given its status as the administrative headquarters of the North West Region received many of these Francophones.

The existence of this Francophone community in Bamenda encouraged more movements into the town as new migrants had people with whom they could identify and fit easily. Clearly, these were cumulative effects of past migrations through networks established over the years. Some Francophone Cameroonians migrated to Bamenda simply to join people with whom they shared ethnic and family ties. This chain migration, which arose from the fact that migrants relied on the network of social relations such as friends and relatives, concerned mostly the Bamileke whose homeland extends to the border with Anglophone Cameroon. They are fragmented into roughly ninety chieftaincies, with no coordinated organization. The mobility and settlement of the Bamileke in Bamenda was comparatively easy given that it occurred at a time when there was demographic pressure on insufficient land, survival challenges, and prospect for a better life in Bamenda. According to Dongmo (1980: 168), the predominance of migration among the Bamileke hinges on the lack of land, overpopulation, and the quest for commercial opportunities.

Such internal migration into Bamenda intensified in the 1980s and beyond when Cameroon was hit by an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. Ensuing from this crisis was currency devaluation, retrenchment of workers, closure of state corporations and reduction of salaries under the weight of the Structural Adjustment Program. This occasioned economic desperation and poverty, provoking movements within the national territory (Sunderlin et al. 2000). Despite migrations from Bamenda to other towns of Cameroon during this period of economic hardship, the town also received migrants of Francophone background. In fact, economic benefit is at the heart of some Francophones' decision to migrate to Bamenda, with immigrants from the Western region taking the lead. Educational opportunities in public and private institutions of learning (primary, secondary and tertiary) have increased educational migration from the Francophone to Bamenda. Today, the town is host to thousands of Francophones whose mobility was triggered by economic, security, educational, religious, social, and administrative motivations (Domchouang 2016).

Francophone Cameroon's diversity in terms of ethnic origin, language and religious affiliation is reflected in the backgrounds of Francophone migrants in Bamenda. It is an immigration marked by huge diversification in terms of their ethnic communities of origin. The migrants came from all corners of the Francophone zone and comprised the Bamileke, Ewondo, Beti, Baya, Maya, Bafia, Bassa, Sawa, Fulbe, Mousgoum, Bamoun, Toupouri, Massa, among others. Migrants from the West Region are over represented, since it is here that the lack of land and economic desperation are common. Difficulties with garnering data prevent a comprehensive compilation of Francophone immigrants. Despite this absence of official statistics, the truism is that there are many of such immigrants in Bamenda categorized into women, men, children, teachers, students, administrators, armed forces, operators of small and medium enterprises, farmers, among others. These migrants have brought to Bamenda traits of their religious and cultural identity. They range from Muslims, Christians to practitioners of indigenous religion. Christian migrants looked for a church having semblance with the church in their place of origin. Integration challenges forced many of them to move from one congregation to another within the brand of Christianity to which they initially belonged, while a few defected from one brand to another. In the last three decades, some of the migrants have terminated membership in historical churches of the host

community, preferring to establish branches of churches headquartered in Francophone Cameroon. Today, these migrant-led congregations represent a non-negligible contingency of missionary force as efforts are made to reach out to members of the host community and other migrants.

Migrants' Integration Experiences in Historical Protestant Churches

The numerous Francophone migrants in Bamenda, as already noted, came along with their religious traits. The Protestant Christians among them hoped to continue going to church in the host community. But the first Protestant migrants who came in the first four decades after Cameroon's reunification quickly came face-to-face with the stark reality that traditional churches in Francophone Cameroon such as EPC and EEC did not exist in Bamenda. Upon arrival therefore these Christian Francophones chose to join the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) and Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) because they were Protestants back home. Their hope was that these traditional Protestant churches in Bamenda were places that could really reflect their spirituality and meet their needs as believers. Dongmo Pierre of Bamileke extraction reported his spiritual expectations when he joined the PCC Congregation at Ntamulung in 1973:

After spending three weeks in Bamenda, I was taken to the Presbyterian Church by my neighbor who also was a member of the church. With very high hopes, I started attending the church, hoping that my spiritual needs will be taken care of. But it was not quite what I was looking for because of huge differences with what I was used to back home. This caused me to defect to the Baptist church where I was welcomed. The only problem was that of language since services were officiated in English.

The experiences of these Protestant Christian migrants were varied and often anchored on their expectations, choice of church, and first encounter. The nature of the first encounter often yielded an initial impression on the part of the migrant, who, depending on how he or she was received, decided whether to stay or to defect to another church. Those who were well received in the first encounter saw it as an initial step towards integration as they had a feeling of acceptance in their host community. Kenfack Bonaventure observed how the good reception he received in the Azire Congregation of the PCC in 1983 made him to feel at home. He has since been active in the church and is member of various associations within the congregation. Ngo Prosper Bassanguen was rather forced to change to a new congregation due to a problematic first encounter caused by the unwelcoming culture in a Baptist Congregation at Ntarinkon.

Such mixed experiences encountered in Protestant churches upon arrival by Christian Francophones who had wanted to use religion as a bridge between their old and their new environments may represent a general picture of the integration picture of these Christians in Bamenda. The structures and liturgies of these churches had a repercussion on the integration of Christians from Francophone Cameroon. Integration was further obstructed by the sole use of the English language in traditional Protestant churches, with leaders hardly envisaging to engage the services of translators. As time passed, officials of these churches resolved to address what may be termed the "Francophone Question" in their churches by initiating theological and administrative reforms in the hope of ensuring that Christian Francophones had a better reception. In PCC congregations, while clinging to the culture of conducting services in English, the welcoming of visitors and new members was added to the menu of

the Sunday service. It intervened towards the close of the service when new members were received by the congregation and later met the elders on a one-on-one basis. But the Parish Pastor of the PCC Congregation at Ntamulung, Rev. E. Ngwa, acknowledged the language problem faced by Francophone members, noting that the church lacks time and resources to conduct bilingual services. Baptists have adopted a similar practice, going as far as giving new members the opportunity to present themselves to the congregation. Sunday services in most Baptist congregations are concurrently conducted in English and French. Newcomers in search of a place of worship are identified in order to facilitate their integration. Jean-Claude Atangana noted with satisfaction the manner with which he was received and made to stay in a Baptist Church at Mile Six Nkwen.

The general picture is that over the years Protestant congregants have improved the care they have for newcomers. Attitudes and behaviours have been revised in ways that foster migrants' participation and integration. In Protestant congregation across Bamenda, there is co-existence between Anglophone and Francophone Christians. The latter have integrated to the point of participating in church groups such as Christian Men Fellowship, Christian Women Fellowship, Baptist Men Association, Baptist Women Association, and in youth groups in these churches. This has made it common for Christians of Francophone background to participate in many church activities such as reading the Bible in front of the community on Sunday, singing as member of a choir group, serving as an elder and sharing communion. Simon-Pierre Mbida is an emblematic example of this active participation, given his full involvement in the theological and administrative life of the PCC congregation in Bambili. Clearly, the thriving of a welcoming environment led to Mbida's involvement in this congregation. Many of the Francophones who were warmly received and given an opportunity to participate feel more Cameroonian than their counterparts who met with cold reception and feel less integrated.

Indeed, cold reception and lack of initiative to ease the integration of newcomers persist to this day in some Protestant congregations. This together with the language barrier discourages migrants' participation. To these integration challenges produced by the host society should be added the fact that Francophone migrants brought with them different cultural traits. Upon arrival in Bamenda, some of these migrants began to build an identity which brought them into various Diaspora cultural groups. Interviews with some of these Francophone Christians have revealed that recourse to identity building was anchored on frustration about the cold reception and the way they were depicted in the congregations. This is clear indication that some Protestant congregations have failed to promote the integration of newcomer Christians from the Francophone zone. This attitude overlooks the interaction between immigrants and local Presbyterians and Baptists. As a result, some migrant Francophone Protestants are not given opportunities to be exposed to Protestantism from the Anglophone Cameroon perspective. Hence opportunities to weave a net of relations with the receiving society through traditional Protestant churches that are crucial for the integration process are missed. Faced with these challenges, some Christian migrants remained more attached with home, seeking to maintain and nourish the religious traits they migrated with. This trend amounts to the establishment of migrant-led congregations of traditional Francophone churches in Bamenda.

Migrant-led Congregations in Bamenda

Accruing from integration difficulties in traditional Protestant churches in Bamenda and migrants' desire to maintain the religious beliefs they brought from their home communities,

migrant-led congregations is a recent phenomenon in the Bamenda Christian landscape. These migrant congregations whose history date to 1994 have come to fill a spiritual vacuum, offering solutions to the already discussed challenges migrants faced in an effort to integrate and participate in traditional Protestant churches in Bamenda. To borrow from Adogame (2013: 507), these congregations offer a “home away from home” for many disenfranchised migrants. The migrant-led congregations which are branches of Francophone Cameroonian churches in Bamenda in the example of *Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun* (EEC) and Francophone congregations of the Cameroon Baptist Convention are visible signs that Christian Francophone migrants prefer to organize and reconstruct the Christianity they moved with initially for themselves.

The pioneer migrant-led EEC congregation was established in Old Town in 1995. This happened when a group of about 10 Francophones from Bamun defected from traditional Protestant churches and started their own meetings in order to be able to worship in French. Angered by cold reception, sole use of English and other integration odds in the PCC and CBC congregations, these migrants began church services in the Cow-Street residence of Daniel Mbouemboue in 1994. On 21 June 1995, the EEC congregation held its first service in the conference hall of the Comprehensive College, following negotiations with its proprietor, Francis Young. The seat of the congregation was then moved to Government School Old Town. The President of the Bamboutos Regional Synod, Pastor Laha Simo officiated the inaugural service at the new site on 9 July 1995. Following a request by Pastor Simo, EEC’s Executive Committee created the Bamenda Old Town Congregation in late 1995 and administratively attached it to the Bamboutos Regional Synod, causing the renaming of the region as the Bamboutos-Mezam Regional Synod (Domchouang 2016).

Later in 1997, EEC’s leadership transferred Pastor Albert Tedzongang to Bamenda to head the congregation at Old Town. Under him, land was acquired on which a church building was constructed in 1999. His successors from 1999 to 2009, namely, Pastor Samuel Guedi, Rev. Emmanuel Tchouake, Pastor Pierre Ekome Ewoba, and Rev. Medard Takam worked hard for the growth of the congregation. In 2005, the membership of this immigrant congregation had increased from 40 to about 90 Christians, with an organizational structure and functional choir groups. The growth of this Francophone gathering necessitated recourse to a policy of opening new EEC congregations in Bamenda. This hinged on the congregation’s potential of self-governance, sufficient financial resources, and the capacity to engage in mission work. These were the basic requirements for establishing new congregation within the EEC. In 2008, Rev. Takam created the second EEC congregation in Bamenda at Bahouock. Two other congregations were established in 2009 at Bandja-Street and Ntarinkon (See Annual Report of General Secretariat, 2010, pages 38-39). In 2011 and 2012, congregations were opened in Bambili and Up Station respectively (Domchouang 2016).

The new congregations equally gained official recognition from EEC’s Executive Committee and are now served by pastors assigned by this body (see official website of EEC, <http://www.eeccameroun.org>). The membership of these EEC congregations is predominantly Francophone. This exportation of the EEC from Francophone Cameroon to Bamenda by immigrants and the accompanying clergy is illustrative of migration’s bearing on mission. In 2015, EEC congregations in Bamenda had a membership of 2196 as the table illustrates.

Table 1: Membership Statistics of EEC Migrant-Led Congregations in 2015

Congregation	Year of Creation	No of Christians
Old-Town	1995	971
Bahouock	2008	25
Bandja-Street	2009	669
Ntarinkon	2009	308
Bambili	2011	150
Up Station	2012	73
TOTAL	-	2196

Source: Domchouang Adrien, Report on the Penetration of the Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun into the North West Region, 15 January 2016.

The table reveals an astounding growth of migrant-led EEC congregations in terms of absolute numbers, probably because of cold reception and language difficulties in local traditional churches. This galloping church growth was all the more due to migrants' commitment to keep their religious traits alive as well as pastoral initiatives undertaken by pastors posted to Bamenda by the EEC's Executive Committee following incessant requests by migrants. But since November 2016, there is a statistical drop in church growth due to the ongoing social unrest in the North West and South West regions.

Baptist churches with Francophone initiatives have also been established in Bamenda under the influence of migrants' cold reception and pastoral neglect in the mainstream churches in the town. Beginning with a few migrants close to two decades ago, two vibrant Baptist congregations with principally Francophone membership were established in neighborhoods such as Finance Junction and Bargoh by Pastor Joel Ngoh. Yaounde-born Pastor Ngoh relocated to Bamenda over two decades ago. He trained as a pastor in Bamenda and started these congregations because of his frustrations in the CBC congregations he attended in Bamenda. Insensitivity to the French language and the absence of attention to the pastoral needs of Christian Francophones pushed Pastor Ngoh to focus his mission work among Francophones. "My mission", proclaimed Pastor Ngoh, "is to roll away the pastoral challenges encountered by Francophones in Bamenda and beyond." He further noted how God called him to minister particularly to the Bamileke community in Bamenda. The spiritual achievements of this mission vision are evidenced by the hundreds of Francophones fellowshipping in these Baptist congregations. These congregations pull many Francophones because of the social and religious support that they provide for their members.

These congregations later gained reputation in the Christian landscape of Bamenda, representing an indispensable factor in the religious life situation of Francophone Cameroonians in the town. These congregations served as places of worship, retreat, and social gatherings for these migrants. It was through these congregations that church life from Francophone Cameroon was reproduced in Bamenda by operating the same church groups for men, women, youth, choir, and prayer. This makes Francophone-led congregations in Bamenda relevant to contemporary mission discourse because they are thriving in a foreign environment in an era of supposedly strained relations between Francophones and Anglophones.²

In recent years, these Francophone Cameroonians in Bamenda are assuming responsibility for the Great Commission by reaching out to members of the host town and migrants from elsewhere. Although the congregations are predominantly Francophone in membership, adherents from Anglophone background are present. The presence of these historic mission denominations established by migrants as extensions of similar churches back home is changing the Christian configuration of the town of Bamenda. This is having an imprint on national integration as Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians now attend the same churches where they are singing the Lord's song in a united voice. This Anglophone element in churches established by Francophones is predicated on intermarriage, friendship ties, and evangelism among members of the host town.

These migrant-led churches faced numerous contextual challenges such as language barriers, accommodation problems, and the persistent Francophone-Anglophone divide. The language barriers which frustrated the integration of Christian Francophones into traditional Protestant churches in Bamenda are stalling the smooth functioning of the churches they eventually established. Migrant-led congregations had a predominantly Francophone, mostly Bamileke membership, but also a small band of Christian Anglophones from the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon. This resulted in language difficulties given that the clerical leaders pastored mainly in the French language. Some Anglophone members of these churches interpret the sole use of French as pastoral language as insensitivity of migrant-led congregations to the Bamenda cultural context, especially language (Felix Ngang Che, 2017, Int.). The long and short of it is that migrant-led congregations are insensitive to the concerns of Christian Anglophones in ways that are worse than their initial experiences in traditional Protestant churches in the host community. There is need for recourse to an inclusive language policy by these congregations in view of beefing up pastoral work among Anglophones in Bamenda.

The widening dichotomy between Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon, which has grown into what has been termed the Anglophone crisis, is an impediment to the further development of Francophone-led congregations in Bamenda. Since November 2017, the crisis took a new twist marked by street demonstrations, ghost towns, destruction of public and private property, and, recently, military operations by secessionist forces. This tense environment, especially in the town of Bamenda, considered as the epicenter of the Anglophone struggle, has occasioned reverse migration among Francophones to towns in the French-speaking regions of Cameroon. For example, the member of the EEC congregation at Bandja Street has dropped from about 260 to 150. In response to our question concerning what was the cause of the dwindling membership, Rev. Joseph Ndema attributed it to the Anglophone crisis. This is threatening the continued existence of these congregations.

CONCLUSION

For well over half a century since the crafting of the modern Cameroon state in 1961, there has been a surge in internal migration in Cameroon, with migrants taking various initiatives to integrate into their host communities. Efforts by migrant Christians to integrate religiously amount to difficult experiences, often producing migrant Christian communities. The integration experiences of Christian Francophone Cameroonians in the town of Bamenda examined in this paper is a pioneering historical initiative at appreciating such a religious phenomenon. The processes behind Cameroon Francophone's involvement in historical

churches in Bamenda and the establishment of migrant-led branches of churches headquartered in the Francophone zone have been analyzed. What becomes clear from what precedes is the fact that Francophone Cameroonians depend on religion to cope with the difficulties of living in a Bamenda society that is foreign to them. The study concludes that the insensitivity of host historical Protestant churches in Bamenda to migrants' participation difficulties occasioned the development of migrant-led churches which serve as loci for identity and as avenues for adapting into the socio-religious context of the host society. Though the membership of these migrant-led congregations is principally Francophone, there is a minority Anglophone element predicated on intermarriage, friendship ties, and evangelism among members of the host town. The challenges ensuing from language barriers and the ongoing Anglophone crisis and the inability of these migrant congregations to equally fully integrate their Anglophone members are stalling the creative missional practice of Christian Francophones in Bamenda. But the integration experiences of these Christian migrants away from home are modifying Bamenda's Christian landscape, with a new form of mission at play. This accords credence to the thesis that Christianity eases migrants' adaptation to new environments especially as the Bamenda case study has shown that there is a relationship between migration and the development of migrant Christian communities.

Footnotes

¹ The reunified Cameroon of 1961 was originally a German protectorate from 1984 to 1916 when it was partitioned between France and Britain. Francophone (French) Cameroon became independent in January 1960 as La Republique du Cameroun. British Cameroon (formerly Southern and Northern Cameroons) decided their independence in the separate United Nations-organized plebiscite in February 1961. While Northern Cameroons voted in favour of gaining independence as part of Nigeria, the Southern section opted for independence through reunification with Francophone Cameroon. This reunification became effective in 1961 following the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Ngoh 2001: 164; Fanso 1999).

² In the last few years, the modern Cameroon state which was constituted in 1961 following the reunification of the two French-speaking and English-speaking zones has been visited by what has been termed the Anglophone crisis. Anglophones are angered by their marginalization in the union, with some opting for secession. This has come with a negative bearing on co-existence between Anglophones and Francophones in Bamenda, thus rendering the religious landscape challenging for Francophone-led congregations.

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