Navigating Transition: The contractualisation of British economic relations to Cameroon amid independence

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Studies on decolonisation have usually portrayed the relationship between the colonisers and the colonies, the fight for independence and the challenges surrounding the complex interplay between sovereignty and colonial continuity. Few have focussed on a decolonisation process that involves two colonial powers fighting to maintain or manage economic dependency in a shared territory. In such a context, the relationship between the two colonial powers determines whether their respective economic agents are risk of losing everything, or alternatively, whether they enjoy guarantees that coordinated actions will secure their market interest and minimise the losses. Meanwhile, the process is even more complicated for the colonised territory, whose leaders and inhabitants have to deal with external forces, the persistence of colonial structures and the agency of local elites. This constellation makes the outcome of decolonisation unpredictable and uncertain.

Decolonisation often involves dismantling colonial economic structures and establishing new systems. This process frequently generates instability and uncertainty, as nations face the challenge of building self-sufficient economies while remaining entangled in persistent dynamics of dependency. As Grégoire Mallard and Jérôme Sguard note, "intermediary periods are marked by protracted political conflicts, epistemic opacity in law, and thus economic disorganisation".[1] In this context, the task of reflecting on how best to mitigate the risks of a failed or incomplete transition does not fall solely on the territory moving toward independence. Former colonial powers are equally concerned, as their economic interests extend well beyond political domination. These interests take shape through independent actions through public or private firms, expatriate state officials and direct market connections, most of which operate within preferential frameworks (such as reduced tariffs or customs exemptions). Moreover, the colonial context is not limited to the colony-metropole dyad; it also

1 *Mallard/Jérôme*, Knowledge.

involves third-party actors. These include foreign economic agents or other colonial powers pursuing their own interests in the territory. This was particularly the case with the United Kingdom in Cameroon, caught between the dual constraints of ending its colonial policy while safeguarding specific economic interests, in a context defined both by the local demand for national sovereignty and by France's political and economic dominance in the region.

Interesting in this context is therefore the question of how the United Kingdom managed the systemic transition process in Cameroon. This chapter pays particular attention to the British government's responses to the concerns of four key economic agents. First, the Cameroon Development Corporation (hereinafter, the Candev), established in 1947 by the British colonial government as a replacement for the West African Plantation Victoria (WAPV) and the African Fruit Company (AFC), which were both German-owned companies operating in British Cameroon. The Candev was created "to acquire, develop and operate extensive plantations of tropical crops such as rubber, bananas and oil palms".[2] Second, the Colonial Development Corporation (hereafter, the CDC); this was a public corporation established alongside the Commonwealth Development Corporation by the British Labour government after the Second World War under the Overseas Resources Development Act of 1948.[3] Its purpose was to investigate, formulate and carry out projects for developing resources in colonial territories, with the aim of expanding the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and other agricultural, industrial or trade developments.[4] The Candev became the property of the Commonwealth Development Corporation and was placed under the authority of the CDC, responsible for organising trade in British Cameroons and facilitating the expansion of cash crop production. Third, Elders and Fyffes, a firm acquired by the American multinational corporation, the United Fruit Company (UFC), in 1913. It was established in Europe as a robust import, handling and distribution system, with facilities including depots, ripening rooms and specialised transport methods. The company was renowned for its effective marketing campaigns, such as the slogans "*Bananas, the all-food fruit*" and "*Remember, they must be ripe*", as well as its branding efforts, such as the

2 *Cameroon Development Corporation*, Report, 6.
3 *Wicker*, Development, 214.
4 *Wicker*, Development, 214.

"Fyffes" logo on bananas.[5] Elders and Fyffes played a significant role in the European banana trade, particularly in the UK and Germany. During and after the Second World War, the firm held the key to exporting the main crops from British Cameroon, particularly bananas, to England. Between January and June 1940, they shipped approximately 4.5 million bunches of bananas before exports were halted in November due to the war, and after the war the company continued to operate in Cameroon.[6] Fourth, the British expatriate staff in the Cameroon.

To assess the British response to the expectations of these economic actors in the post-plebiscite period, I examine the British Empire's efforts to manage transition in Cameroon between 1961 and 1963. More specifically, I analyse the methods employed by British administrative actors to maintain economic ties with the country, the legal mechanisms through which the United Kingdom sought to regulate its postcolonial presence, and the role played by Cameroonian actors in this process—one that I describe, following Mallard and Sguard, as *contractualisation*. These authors introduce the concept of *contractual knowledge*, which they define as a composite form of legal and paralegal expertise encompassing the negotiation, renegotiation, and enforcement of obligations arising from contracts.[7]

Methodologically, the chapter explores the efforts of the UK to mitigate uncertainty in terms of risk and security. Knight (1921) distinguished between measurable risk, which can be calculated and managed, and unmeasurable uncertainty, which arises from unique situations where probabilities cannot be objectively determined. He argues that uncertainty alters economic structures, necessitating decision-making based on opinions rather than perfect knowledge. In colonial states moving into independence, risk and uncertainty are both specific to the transitional process: uncertainty because of the abrupt and often emotional character of the end of colonisation, and risk because the change unfolds in an environment of unstable and contested authority and evolving autonomy, which renders the actions of the main actors (the politicians, the economic agents and the population) unpredictable or difficult to anticipate. Moreover, in the context of power struggles, transitions are often shaped, and sometimes imposed by the colonial state that continues to control the political administration of the dominated territory. This makes it difficult for both the newly indepen-

5 *Wilke*, Banane, 41.
6 *Wilke*, Banane, 289.
7 *Mallard/Sguard*, Knowledge, 27–29.

dent country, in this case Cameroon, and for external actors (foreign firms) to anticipate and monitor what they are likely to gain from the process.

While Amin emphasises that the outcomes of decolonisation can appear predictable insofar as a newly independent state becomes incorporated into the global capitalist system, the Cameroonian case reveals important nuances. The structural position of former colonies may indeed tend toward clarity, yet the pathways through which this position is established are not necessarily certain. In Cameroon, the presence of competing French interests meant that Britain's postcolonial role was far from predetermined. The outcome for the UK was therefore uncertain, compelling the British Empire to actively manage the transition in order to preserve its economic foothold.

Mallard and Sguard consider that the transition from British imperial governance to multilateral legal systems in former colonies mirrors the shifts in power dynamics during decolonisation.[8] These shifts often involve uncertainty as newly independent nations seek to assert their sovereignty while integrating into a global system dominated by former colonial power. In Cameroon, the United Kingdom strove to legitimise its presence in the dominated territory post-independence, and the British administration thus sought to contractualise its economic relations with Cameroon through trade agreements to ensure that its interests were protected, establishing a new legal framework which Mallard and Sguard call *contractual knowledge*. Contractual knowledge combines formalistic law and practical law and involves the standardisation of legal provisions and interpretive rules, which reduces uncertainty by creating predictable frameworks from market exchange. In the case of Cameroon, the British government put a variety of measures in place to establish clarity, namely negotiated trade agreements and *pour-parlers* to mitigate losses amidst currency changeover.

Cameroon – A Transimperial Territory

Cameroon was a hosting territory of transimperialism, i.e. a territory that had to navigate colonial rule between three European empires. Thus, looking at the process of decolonisation in Cameroon requires us to go beyond nationalised narratives and focus on the entangled processes of imperial

8 *Mallard/Sguard*, Knowledge, 30.

competition, cooperation and connectivity.[9] At the end of German domination in 1916, the country was made subject to new regulations by the League of Nations and placed under the mandates of France and Great Britain in 1919, with 20 percent of the territory on the western side under British rule,[10] and the remaining 80 percent under the French system of assimilation.[11] The same partition remained when the United Nations was established in 1945 and the mandate became a trusteeship with the same prerogatives and requirements for the responsible territories (France and the UK). These requirements foresaw the submission of an annual report on the activities promoting development in the respective French and British territories, in order to enable the international organisation to determine whether the population could administer its territory autonomously.

The name of the country changed several times depending on the colonial power in control and the form of government. German Cameroon was named Kamerun. The mandates were officially referred to as "Cameroons under British Mandate" and "Cameroon under French mandate" respectively. The British part consisted of Northern Cameroons in the north and Southern Cameroons in the south. It was a mandated territory until the UN trusteeship in 1945, when the country retained the naming British Cameroon including Northern and Southern Cameroon. During the talks for independence only the appellation Southern Cameroon and or British Cameroon remained. The French part was called French Cameroon before and after the trusteeship.[12] Once the reunification of the British and French parts was complete, British Cameroon, consisting solely of Southern Cameroon, retained the names Southern Cameroon, Anglophone Cameroon, English Cameroon or West Cameroon. The French-speaking part retained the above-mentioned names, to which was added the Republic of Cameroon.

9 *Hedinger/Heé*, History.
10 *Dupraz*, Legacies.
11 *Lekane/Asuelime*, Country.
12 The form of government also led to changes in the names of the parts of the country. Cameroon became the Federal Republic of Cameroon after reunification, but the names of the federated states remained unchanged. On the one hand, there was East Cameroon or French-speaking Cameroon or even francophone Cameroon, and sometimes the Republic of Cameroon (for those in the English-speaking part who still did not identify with the union of the two Cameroons), and on the other, West Cameroon or English-speaking Cameroon or even Anglophone Cameroon.

France and Great Britain each administered their side of the country separately. The French assimilation policy allocated collaborative Cameroonians the status of so-called *évolués*, meaning those who respected French standards and were integrated into the colonial administration alongside French officials.[13] The British part of Cameroon was governed as an extension of Nigeria, with Northern Cameroons integrated into Northern Nigeria and Southern Cameroons administered as part of Eastern Nigeria. British indirect rule assigned traditional chiefs or collaborative elites the responsibility of managing the local administration on behalf of the colonisers, alongside colonial agents.[14] In British Cameroon, integrated into Nigeria, this system relied on the Nigerian socio-political structure. The French and British colonial rule in Cameroon remained unchanged after the UN trusteeship.

In British Cameroon, local unrest was caused by the economic domination of Nigerian elites and German merchants, as Germany had retained some assets and lands on the British side after 1916. Germany also controlled trade in specific areas, since it retained "heavy investments in the plantations, which covered over 360 square miles, together with railways and rolling stock, light planes, dwellings and factories".[15] The connection to Nigeria, which was under British colonial rule, meant that Nigerian chiefs and ethnic groups had a certain amount of agency in regard to Cameroonians, a situation which caused distress especially in the southern area of British Cameroon that was connected to Eastern Nigeria. Konings notes that the British administration of Southern Cameroon as a portion of the Nigerian territory led to flagrant neglect, and the strong economic dominance of Igbo and Efik-Ibibio migrants.[16] This caused a gradual rise in the number of Cameroonian nationalist and autonomist activists calling for self-government.[17] Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, Nigeria's economic forces in Southern Cameroon left the territory to take pre-emptive action ahead of the war. They abandoned and closed their businesses, causing further frustrations and economic disorientation.[18]

13 *Lekane/Asuelime*, Country, 140.
14 *Dupraz*, Legacies, 654.
15 *Ndi*, War, 207.
16 *Konings*, Struggle, 289–325, 291.
17 *Konings*, Struggle, 289–325, 291.
18 *Ndi*, War.

Before the Second World War, the two parts of the country were subject to different economic regimes. British Cameroon, with its connection to Nigeria, fell under the regulations of the British West African market and the sterling area system, with Nigerian sterling used as legal tender in the territory. The sterling area emerged from the pre-war Sterling Block as a more formal and regulated system, designed to consolidate the British Empire's financial resources and mitigate the strain of war debts on the United Kingdom.[19] Its core function was to strengthen intra-imperial trade and the international position of sterling by establishing it as the dominant reserve and transaction currency for member states, whose own currencies were pegged to it. The French part of the territory, connected to French Equatorial Africa, evolved under the economic and market regulations of the French colonies. Throughout the war, the Free French under De Gaulle and the British coordinated their actions to secure their finances and connect their markets, for example through Anglo-French monetary cooperation, and Cameroon was at the centre of their coordinated activities when Germany occupied France during the Second World War. However, by the end of the war, the implementation of economic reforms by the Free French government in French colonies, including Cameroon, marked a significant shift in the region's monetary system, centralising all the economic management of French colonies into De Gaulle's hand, with the subsequent marginalisation of British interests. At the same time, Cameroonians' claims for independence were given little or no attention in these post-war economic reforms. The creation of the *Caisse Centrale de la France Libre* (Central Treasury of Free France, CCFL) and its transformation into the *Caisse Centrale de la France d'Outremer* (Central Treasury of Overseas French Territories, CCFOM) centralised economic control under Free French administration. The introduction of the "CFA franc" further consolidated French dominance, imposing more challenges to British economic activities especially in the context of claims for a systemic transition. The plebiscite of 1961, resulting in Southern Cameroon's decision to join the Republic of Cameroon,[20] marked a crucial turning point. At that moment,

19 *Stockwell*, End, 25.

20 John Ngu Foncha became Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons. When French Cameroon gained its independence on 1 January 1960, Southern Cameroonians were asked to decide on their fate. The United Nation organised a plebiscite on 11 February 1961, where they voted to join the Republic of Cameroon rather than Nigeria. The plebiscite resulted in a victory for the KNDP (Kamerun National Democratic Party), which won 70.5 percent of the vote. See *Takougang*, Nationalism.

Great Britain had no other choice than to manage an economic transition in Cameroon which would respect both the needs of Cameroonians for autonomy and the demands of its economic institutions as well as British citizens working locally. This was all the more important as the Nigerian sterling they used lost its status as legal means of exchange in southern Cameroon in favour of the CFA franc controlled by France.

In terms of economic challenges, this meant that the United Kingdom would have to respond to potential losses in trade and monetary exchange. Regarding trade, the transition involved the end of the trusteeship trade preferences, which meant the possible introduction of tariff barriers on key Cameroonian exports to Britain, such as bananas, copper and cocoa. In terms of monetary challenges, expatriate staff, British firms and other commercial agents could face financial losses resulting from the demonetisation of the Nigerian shilling and the introduction of the French CFA franc, which granted specific advantages to French trade in Cameroon, often at the expense of other foreign currencies and external trading interests.

Securitisation in the Transition Period: The Trade Agreement to Circumvent Uncertainty during the Systemic Transition in Southern Cameroon from 1961 to 1962

If one considers the debate on economic dependency, one could argue that the decolonisation process does not necessary involve uncertainty, since it does not fundamentally alter the economic dependency of former colonies. Samir Amin argues that the capitalist system inherently perpetuates inequality, assigning the periphery the role only of exporter or resource provider. In this respect, the outcome of decolonisation is clear for the colonised territories unless there is a complete break from the global capitalist system.[21] Moreover, the colonial powers can, as Porter (2016) and Patriquim (2021) put it, easily adapt to possible changes or challenges, and maintain economic control through indirect means.[22] This adaptability creates a scenario in which economic actors in newly independent states must contend with the lingering influence of former colonial powers, making it difficult for them to predict the long-term outcomes of decolonisation.

21 *Amin*, Revolution; *Amin*, Accumulation.
22 *Porter*, Empire; *Patriquim*, Meiksins.

Yet even if the capitalist system offers a clear margin of action for the protection of the economic interests of the colonisers, as Amin suggests, the uncertainty factor remains high for both the colonisers and the colonised when the former is weakened by the actions of another colonial power. Highlighting the role of monetary system in maintaining colonial ties, Ndongo Sylla and Fanny Pigeau argue with Joseph Pouémi that, without monetary sovereignty, economic actors in the process of transition face significant constraints, as their economies remain tied to the interests of the former coloniser.[23] This creates uncertainty for local businesses and policymakers, who must navigate a system designed to benefit external actors. The same constraints also apply to the economic agents acting on behalf of the colonial power who are not able to impose the terms of transition in the context of transimperialism. Achille Mbembe notes the influence of other transnational actors in the context of globalisation: in his view, the transnationalisation of economies often leads to competition for the infrastructure left by the colonial state, which can result in internal conflict and economic instability. For economic actors, this creates an unpredictable environment where the rules of engagement are constantly shifting.[24]

Cameroon under British trusteeship was governed by a decentralised system of indirect rule, but British citizens were appointed in the administrative bodies to manage the colony and its economy. As soon as the results of the 1961 plebiscite were announced—in which the Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria and the Southern Cameroons opted to join the Cameroon Republic—a meeting was convened in the United Kingdom to assess the implication of this transition. Held at the Colonial Office in London on 2 March 1961, the meeting brought together representatives from key departments, including the Colonial Office, the Treasury, the Board of Trade, the Foreign Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office and Customs and Excise. The discussion focussed on the political, economic and trade ramifications of Southern Cameroon's integration into the Republic of Cameroon, particularly the future of UK imperial trade preferences and the economic position of the United Kingdom in Cameroon, assessing the best way to avoid economic distress after reunification. It addressed critical issues such as the continuation of preferences for Southern Cameroons exports (notably bananas), the challenges of certifying the origin of goods, and the broader economic impact of the transition. Additionally, the actors

23 *Sylla/Pigeau*, Currency; *Pouémi*, Monnaie.
24 *Mbembe*, Decolonisation.

questioned the role of France in potentially extending trade preferences to the Southern Cameroons and benefiting from discriminatory trade policies against other external powers, including the UK.

The Colonial Office was concerned about a possible economic crisis that could arise in Cameroon in case of an abrupt cessation of their relationship to the territory after reunification, warning that "if the economy of the southern Cameroon was undermined it would have to be supported by other means or collapse. (...) The UK could not wash her hands of the southern Cameroons after 40 years of trusteeship leaving it to face an economic crisis".[25] As a colonised territory, Southern Cameroon was managed by foreign administrative staff, foreign firms and budgetary assistance. It is therefore obvious that the transition also implied assistance, at least for a determined period of time, to mitigate socio-political and economic distress. Yet, more was at stake for the UK than its humanitarian and moral duty, as maintaining preferential terms in relation to certain Cameroonian products would protect the companies that managed exports and benefited from imports.

This is made clear by the type of players who were present at this meeting. The Colonial Office played a central role in managing the transition, including drafting policies and coordinating with other departments. The Treasury focused on the financial implication of the transition and the potential economic burden on the UK. The Board of Trade was concerned with trade preferences and the impact on UK exports and imports; the Foreign Office addressed international relations and the role of the United Nation in overseeing the transition. The expatriate staff and commercial entities, represented by companies like Elders and Fyffes, were involved in managing exports, particularly bananas, and ensuring trade continuity.

These British representatives were tasked with ensuring that parallel to the necessity of a progressive shift in southern Cameroon from colonial administration to nation state, economic losses for British firms and expatriate staff in the territory would be mitigated. They were also responsible for monitoring French influence and taking action to manage economic constraints caused by French financial laws in Cameroon. On tariff and

25 National Archives Kew. FO371/154791. Colonial Office. Reference. EGD 397/430/01. 9 March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss "the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products". 1. General Consideration. Mr. Emanuel (Colonial Office).

currency arrangements, the Colonial Office (CO) proposed a separate customs administration between both Cameroons as long as the common custom area of the federation was still a project. Before the unification, one official from the CO, Mr Vernon, recalled that both territories were subject to the same trusteeship regulations. This meant that their tariffs were non-discriminatory. Hence “there was no question of UK having enjoyed preferences in the Southern Cameroons which it would now lose”,[26] he said. Moreover, the Board of Trade raised concerns that French monetary laws in the Cameroon Republic could undermine British trade. Because of currency restrictions in French overseas countries and territories, trading in Cameroon with British sterling could be restricted, as the French franc was the only international currency in circulation in Cameroon that was convertible with the CFA franc. The Board of Trade feared that the UK would be discriminated against by the issue of the French colonial francs. Yet it would be possible to circumvent these restrictions by calling in Article VIII of the International Monetary Fund agreement on free trade, or later under the provisions of the General Agreement for Tariff and Trade (GATT) once the GATT was ratified.

Concerning prices, import and export control, the Candev was still under British management through the British Colonial Development Corporation. The Colonial Office reminded the meeting that the institution with the B. W. I. (British West Indies) continued to ensure that a British company, Elders and Fyffes, responsible for managing the trade in Southern Cameroonian main crops “would be making no more than a reasonable profit—especially concerning products like bananas from which the Commonwealth enjoyed virtually the full value of the preference i.e. £7.10s per ton”.[27] Southern Cameroon’s main export crop was traded in the UK market more than in France due to the advantages provided by the preferential tariff. Concern was raised about the lack of alternatives in case British lost its control of Cameroonian bananas. “France imported 345 thousand tons of bananas in 1958 and all except 0.3 thousand tons came from her

26 National Archives Kew. FO371/154791. Colonial Office. EGD 397/430/01. 9 March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss “the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products”. 5. Tariff and Currency Arrangements. Mr. Vernon.

27 National Archives Kew. FO371/154791. Colonial Office, 9 March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss “the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products”. 6. Period Necessary for Integration. Mr. Vernon (Colonial Office).

own preferential sources. During the same period, the UK imported 310 thousand tons and took most of the Cameroons' production of 85 thousand tons,"[28] explained the CO. An end to the preferential tariff would lead to an increase in prices controlled not by the UK but by the Cameroonian government under French economic management. Moreover, "if Cameroon knew that in a limited time, they would lose the preference they would look for other markets".[29]

The focus on bananas was not without good reasons, as Southern Cameroon's economy relied on the production and the export of this specific crop,[30] and the UK was the main beneficiary. Other products like cocoa, timber, rubber and palm oil were also important for Cameroonian international trade but the withdrawal of preferential tariffs on these goods does not seem to have been a concern during the meeting. However, the bigger issue for the British Government was not which country would trade in Cameroonian bananas after unification but how to ensure that Elders and Fyffes secured their assets, given that bananas were the main concern for the British trade interest in Cameroon. In fact, "more than £2,000,000 worth of bananas were exported from that 66,000-square-mile area every year"[31]—as published by the British newspaper, the *Daily Express*, in January 1954—and the UK was the main beneficiary. The Colonial Office pointed out that the whole of the Cameroons exports was handled by Elders and Fyffes, which still then was the only company authorised to deliver certificates of origin for the goods under preference.[32] The Department of Customs and Excise suggested revising the certification to allow for more supervision, ensuring that only goods from Southern Cameroon, a member of the Commonwealth, would benefit from tariff preferences.[33] Thus, it was

28 Ibid.

29 National Archives Kew. FO371/154791. Colonial Office, 9 March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss "the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products". 6. Period Necessary for Integration. Mr. Emanuel (Colonial Office).

30 National Archives Kew, CO 554/912. Financial Implications of Establishing Southern Cameroon as a Separated Region.

31 Daily Express, 22 January 1954. The New State. Banana-Land Votes for Independence. By Kenneth Macaulay.

32 National Archives Kew. Ref. FO371/154791. Colonial Office, 9th March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss "the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products". 7. Trade position. Mr. Morris (Colonial Office).

33 National Archives Kew. FO371/154791. With the Compliment of Mr. Foulkes,

necessary for the company to keep control over the main crop and continue to decide at what price bananas would be sold and exported.

As important as bananas were, in retrospect it seems clear that the economy of Cameroon could have benefited from a diversification of production and the monitoring of prices and tariffs by the local government. But the aim was not to encourage a rapid industrialisation of the country. As the head of Customs and Excise suggested, preferences had to be limited on specific items to avoid, in his terms, pumping the land with money and causing rapid industrialisation.[34] He argued that newly independent territories received money from various sources and there was the possibility of rapid industrialisation. Industrialisation might seem too remote to be considered in the short term envisaged for the continuance of the preferential tariff but bearing in mind the rapid development in Hong Kong, he thought the preferences should be limited to items at present enjoying the preference such as bananas, cocoa etc.[35]

The discussion closed with a consensual position in favour of legislation facilitating further trade relations with southern Cameroon. What remained was to organise the context and the conditions in which the legal framework had to shift from proposal to implementation. British officials had to ensure that the maintenance of the trade preference with southern Cameroon and the introduction of parallel legislation would not conflict with unification. It was important to communicate the scheme to France and to the leaders of the Republic of Cameroon to ensure their agreement before proceeding with any official decision. Moreover, it was agreed that the scheme "should make it clear that the continuance of the preference was recommended for a definite period and on the understanding that there would be no discrimination by the Southern Cameroons against United Kingdom goods in favour of French goods".[36] It was also important for the British Customs and Excise to ensure that the legislation provided for

Customs and Excise. 20 March 1961. To Miss D. M. Amber from the Colonial Office.

34 National Archives Kew, FO371/154791. Colonial Office, 9 March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss "the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products". 11. Limitation of Preferential Items.

35 Ibid.

36 National Archives Kew. Ref. FO371/154791. Colonial Office, 9th March 1961. Cameroon Preference. Confidential. Draft. Minutes of a meeting held in the Colonial Office at 11 a. m. on the 2nd March to discuss "the Future of Tariff Preferences in Cameroon Products". 12. Overlapping of Preferences.

certificates of origin for goods from Southern Cameroon, since "under a federal set up, if [an] expatriate staff remains, that would be of small help but it would be extremely difficult to police a border between two steadily integrating economies".[37] The Customs and Excise department had assessed ways and means of addressing these risks but could not guarantee to the Board of Trade that they would be able to provide confirmation that goods exported from Southern Cameroon were grown, produced or manufactured there. However, according to the Colonial Office, any potential fraud would not have a huge impact on the agreement since the preference margin on many of the commodities produced in Cameroon was hardly big enough to encourage the production of fraudulent certificates on a large scale; in the case of bananas, the shipments were mainly in the hands of Elders and Fyffes and came through their head office in Tiko. Mismanagement by the company would be against its own interests.[38]

The integration into the new Republic of Cameroon was about to change the trade dynamic and the British administration wanted to be part of this new relationship. The UK addressed the issue of the trade preference with relative openness in relation to the risks for both Southern Cameroon and the United Kingdom. The memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Colonies expressed it well:

> *Something like half of the Southern Cameroons exports are in the form of bananas and the sole market, for which their production has been expanded in recent years, is the United Kingdom. They enjoy a preference of £7 per ton and if this were removed without replacement the price to the grower would drop by about 25 % and the return would be below the cost of production for most producers. The rest of the Southern Cameroons exports for the most part enjoy preference in the UK i.e. on cocoa, timber, palm oil and sheet rubber. There are substantial commercial U.K. interests involved in this trade. A considerable investment in the Cameroon Development Corporation (the main exporter of bananas) is held by the Colonial Development Corporation.*[39]

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37 National Archives Kew. Ref. FO371/154791. With the Compliments of Mr. Foulkes, Customs and Excise. 20 March 1961. To Miss D. M. Amber from the Colonial Office.

38 National Archives Kew. Ref. FO371/154791. Confidential. Commonwealth Preference for British Cameroons. Mr. Goldsmith to Mr. Foulkes. 5 June 1960.

39 National Archives Kew, FO371/154791. Confidential. C(61). Cabinet, the Cameroons under UK Trusteeship and Imperial Preference, 1961. Imperial Preference. Memorandum by the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs and the Colonies.

Representatives of British ministries suggested that a trade agreement in the form of an exchange of letters should be concluded with the Federal Republic of Cameroon. They proposed a limited period of one year after official reunification on 1 October 1961. Further negotiations with the federal administrative bodies both in Southern Cameroon and in the French-speaking part, and with the Candev and Elders and Fyffes, extended the continuation of the preference up to 1963. The name "Imperial Preference" was changed to "Commonwealth Preference."

As soon as the total separation of Southern Cameroon from Nigeria was enacted after the plebiscite, arrangements on currency were needed to separate Southern Cameroon from the sterling area.

The British Colonial Administration and the Currency Changeover in Cameroon

If the contractualisation of British trade with Cameroon was an important component of the decolonisation process to mitigate uncertainty, currency changeover was also a major obstacle. The decision to continue the preference in specific products, including bananas, cocoa, rubber, timber and palm oil was already implemented in June 1961 but the discussion did not really consider the major challenge of currency changeover in Southern Cameroon.

Despite the legal framework to continue trading with Southern Cameroon, uncertainty and risk remained, due to the upcoming demonetisation of Nigerian sterling in the territory in favour of the French CFA. On 22 June 1961, the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) warned its administration and the Foreign Office that after 1 October Nigerian sterling would no longer circulate in Southern Cameroon. The CRO argued, with the representatives of the Commissioner of Southern Cameroon, that if this issue was not taken seriously, there was a high risk that the territory would encounter serious security difficulties. Sir Hilton Poynton expressed concern over the population's potential response to the abrupt monetary transition, noting that the demonetisation of Nigerian sterling could deprive citizens of the remaining value of their holdings in that currency.[40]

40 National Archives Kew, FO 371/155357. UK Government's concern about currency situation which will arise in S. Cameroons after Oct. 1 1961 Cameroon. With the Compliments of Sir Hilton Poynton 16 August 1961.

It was thus important to take preventative measures to avoid unrest. The British administration took this warning seriously and sent representatives to the city of Buea to discuss the matter with the head of both federal states. In Buea, President Ahidjo and the head of the Federal State of Southern Cameroon John Ngu Foncha agreed on 26 June 1961 that "on their behalf and on behalf of the Republican and Southern Cameroonian Governments the United Kingdom would take the matter up with the Nigerian authorities (…) to minimise the risk of trouble immediately across the frontier".[41] With this, they handed over the process of currency transition in Southern Cameroon to the British government. From the UK's perspective, it was important to set a reasonable timeline between reunification and the demonetisation of the British colonial currency in Southern Cameroon. An abrupt demonetisation of Nigerian sterling could not only cause security issues but also huge economic losses for British workers and companies in Southern Cameroon. It was thus decided that Nigerian sterling in Southern Cameroon would remain in circulation for six months.[42] The aim was to allow a period of adjustment before the currency changeover and to minimise losses following exchange restrictions with the CFA system.

The Federal Republic of Cameroon (hereafter FRC) under French currency control was already continuing the tariffs barrier and exchange control regulations.[43] These prompted the need for a reorganisation of British duties in Southern Cameroon in order to protect the savings of expatriate employees of the Colonial Development Corporation. This involved transferring assets from the fund allocated to the Candev into three new trust funds: the Cameroon fund, for staff domiciled in the Federal Republic of Cameroon, governed by West Cameroon law; the African fund for staff domiciled in Africa (outside Cameroon), governed by Nigerian federal law; and the overseas fund for staff outside Africa, governed by English law.[44] The trustees of the new Cameroon fund sought permission to make sterling

41 National Archives Kew, FO371/154791. Confidential. Commonwealth Relations Office. Downing Street, London, S.W.1. 26.6.1961. E.B. Boothby, Esq., CMG, Foreign Office.

42 National Archives Kew, FO 371/155357. UK Government's concern about currency situation which will arise in S. Cameroons after Oct. 1 1961 Cameroon. With the Compliments of J. Chadwick.

43 National Archives Kew. FO 371/125653. British Consulate B.P. 4031, Buea. No. 29 (E) 312/6. 3 July 1957. "Journal Officiel de l'Etat sous Tutelle du Cameroon".

44 National Archives Kew. FO 371/155357. UK Government's concern about currency situation which will arise in S. Cameroons after Oct 1. 1961. Cameroon. Colonial Development Corporation. 33 Hill Street, London W 1, 900 EC 700. The Chief

remittances from sale proceeds of sterling securities held in the fund after the imposition of exchange control. Their request was supported by the fact that the Cameroon authorities had shown a cooperative attitude and had indicated their willingness to allow the trustees to continue holding sterling securities after exchange control was imposed. If the UK authorities did not grant permission for sterling remittances, the trustees of the Cameroon fund would sell sterling securities before the imposition of exchange control, resulting in significant financial losses and early departure of their funds to the sterling area.

The question of how to handle local claims in Southern Cameroon amid France's ongoing influence was also a topic of discussion in the UK. On 30 November 1961, the Foreign Office hosted a meeting on this issue, attended by officials from the Colonial Office and the Treasury.[45] For the Colonial Office and the Treasury, it was important to respond constructively to local demands, as this could enhance British credibility and reputation. However, another Treasury representative saw no advantage in providing positive responses to local claims. After the reunification with French Cameroon, southern Cameroon had become West Cameroon. Very soon, West Cameroon asked for the conversion of the British pre-independence exchequer loan into a grant and claimed the unspent balances of approved Colonial Development and Welfare (CD&W) schemes. The Colonial Office and the Treasury advocated for these claims at the meeting, arguing that the UK should give West Cameroon all the funds it believed were due. Failure to do so, they warned, could have political repercussions, as the population might feel betrayed—particularly at a time when France was earning goodwill through its financial support.[46] The objection was made that under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, money was not available for independent countries. Further financial aid to West Cameroon was not accepted, although the UK's direct competitor, France, was assisting the Federal Republic of Cameroon at a rate of £19 million a year.[47] Here also the accepted solution was that further moves in favour of an assistance or an economic relation to Cameroon would be contractualised. Hence, to ensure a better legal management of the transition, the Federal Republic

Cashier, Bank of England, Threadneedle Street, London, E.C.2. For the Attention of Dr. A.H. Chadwick.

45 National Archives Kew. FO 371/155357. Cf. Confidential. West Cameroon. Meeting held at Foreign Office. 30 November 1961.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

of Cameroon was included among the member countries of the Commonwealth Preference.

For the UK, the Commonwealth Preference was the first step in maintaining an advantage in Southern Cameroon. But it was set to last only few years, since Southern Cameroon was no longer an independent entity. The British thus hoped to sign an economic cooperation agreement with the Federal Republic of Cameroon to mitigate uncertainty amidst French domination. It was thus not surprising that after two years of preference with only Southern Cameroon, the UK ended the preference in order to negotiate better terms with the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The Commonwealth Preference was set to end on 23 September 1963 and forecasts showed that this would particularly affect the banana exports that could fall under the imposition of £7.10s per ton, making them unsellable in the UK.[48] This set off alarm bells in the Cameroonian federal government, which sought to negotiate a one-year transition period during which Southern Cameroon would continue to benefit from this preferential agreement. However, for London, only one option was acceptable: the signing of a new preferential agreement with the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In terms of securitisation, this approach may be interpreted as aligning with the need to mitigate risks linked to uncertainty.

A meeting with the goal of a new preferential agreement was held at Admiralty House in London on 8 May 1963 between the Cameroonian delegation represented by President Ahidjo, Mr Martin Epie (Ambassador of Cameroon in London), Mr Emmanuel Egbe Tabi (Deputy Minister of Justice) and Mr Zachée Mongo Soo (Chargé de Mission at the Presidency), and the British delegation represented by the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan Sir Roger Stevens, Mr E. R. Warner (HM Ambassador to Yaoundé) and Mr G. E. Millard.[49] They agreed to sign a trade agreement

48 National Archives Kew. OD 20/125. FAMA. Technical Assistance to Federal Cameroon General Policy. 1961, FO, Cameroon Relations with the UK. CF. 22/01, 1964–66. Finance, Technical Assistance to W. Cameroon. General Policy. Restricted. With the compliment of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Department of Technical Co-operation. 17.07.1963. No. 20 (1011/63) British Embassy, Yaoundé. July 4, 1963.

49 National Archives Kew. OD 20/125. FAMA. Technical Assistance to Federal Cameroon General Policy. 1961, FO, Cameroon Relations with the UK. CF. 22/01, 1964–66. Finance, Technical assistance to W. Cameroon. General Policy. Confidential. With the compliment of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Mr Allen Foreign Office, 1963. Confidential. Record of Talks between the Prime Minister

with the Federal Republic of Cameroon instead of continuing the preferential treatment of only West Cameroon under Commonwealth agreements, since Cameroon was much more under French influence.[50] Thus, an *Agreement on Commercial and Economic Co-operation between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in one side and the Government of Cameroon on the other side with additional Protocol and Exchange of Letters* was signed in London on 29 July 1963.[51]

These provisions set the legal for fostering economic cooperation and trade between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Cameroon in the near future.

Conclusion

In Cameroon, Great Britain was compelled to address the immediate needs of its market in order to safeguard commercial relations during the transitional period. This was a predictable phase, as the calls for independence had already set the country on an irreversible course. Yet the outcome of the transition remained unpredictable in terms of France's continued influence in Cameroon. Between 1961 and 1963, Britain had no choice but to engage in managing a transition that would preserve its economic ties—first with Southern Cameroon, then with West Cameroon, and ultimately with the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Despite France's pervasive presence in the country's economic and financial administration through the CFA system and the imposition of tariff barriers, Britain successfully established mechanisms to maintain and protect its economic interests in Cameroon. This transition represented a dual

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and the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon at Admiralty House at 10.30 am on Wednesday, May 8, 1963.

50 National Archives Kew. OD 20/125. FAMA. Technical Assistance to Federal Cameroon General Policy. 1961, FO, Cameroon Relations with the UK. CF. 22/01, 1964–66. Finance, Technical assistance to W. Cameroon. General Policy. Cf. With the compliment of the West and Central African Department. Mr Allen D. T. C. Brief G, Anglo-Cameroon Trade. Background.

51 The key obligations for each party as outlined in the document included: the expansion of trade (Art I); the quantitative restrictions on imports (Art II); the transparency in commercial information with statistics (Art III); free shipping in convertible currency (Art V). Securing measures were also provided, such as the arbitration in case of dispute (Art VI); insurance in industrial and commercial undertakings (Article VII); economic and commercial exhibitions (Art VIII); mixed monitoring commission (Art IX) as well as duty-free entry to specific products (Protocol).

strategic challenge. On the one hand, it was crucial for the United Kingdom that the transition should succeed, given its central role in the Southern Cameroon market and in overseeing administrative arrangements during the transition. On the other hand, a successful transition was equally vital for the administration of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, which had to ensure the resilience of its economy in the face of transitional challenges, international demands, and growing competition in global markets.

The contractualisation of economic relations between Cameroon and Great Britain thus unfolded within a framework of mutual resilience. Far from being a mere economic adjustment, this process illustrates the complexity of decolonisation in a context of transimperialism, as former colonial powers seek to preserve strategic interests while newly independent states worked to assert sovereignty and stability. The Cameroonian administration, in navigating these dynamics, played its part in preserving trade interests with the UK by calling for both a transitional phase to avoid immediate losses in trade following the end of preferential treatment and negotiating a new trade agreement with the United Kingdom, which for the UK had to include the whole national market. This experience offers valuable insights for the study of economic dependency in post-colonial state relations.

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