

# BOOK REVIEW

**Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué. *Gender, Separatist Politics and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019. Note on Terminology. Abbreviations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 346 pp. \$34.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780472054138.**

In *Gender, Separatist Politics and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon*, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué takes a close look at the way women in Cameroon have gained access to political power. Anglophone Cameroonian women accepted the traditional patriarchal construct and chose not to disrupt it, instead creating a gender-based ethnic politics aimed at strengthening women's participation in other professions that did not threaten the male-dominated political space. Mougoué offers the example of Anna Foncha, who was the wife of the second premier of southern Cameroon, John Foncha. Anna Foncha argued that she performed mere domestic roles, that she knew nothing about social and political events (3). Yet, she drafted the campaign speech that enabled her husband to win the election in 1959.

Chapter One examines the dynamics of decolonization in Cameroon and the context of Anglophone entanglement in the transition to the post-colonial era. Central to the discussion was Ahmadou Ahidjo's tactics of subjugating Anglophone Cameroon to its French legacies (34–36). The appointment of Gwendoline Etonde Burnley to the Federal National Assembly was a departure from the previous political realities of Cameroon (25–29). Gwendoline's successful political career reinforced new ways of upholding Anglophone identities in contemporary Cameroon (56). In Chapter Two, Mougoué historicizes the lives of women through motherhood and social networks as spaces to express nationalist actions. This is evident in a picture that shows Anna Foncha surrounded by women dancing in the 1960s (73). By 1966, women were more interested in framing ideal womanhood in the context of political changes (87–94).

Chapter Three correlates the domestic sciences with nation building. On March 31, 1965, Women's Day in west Cameroon was sponsored by the government; female politicians emphasized domestic science education in their speeches. Part of the redefinition process involves the way west


Cameroonian women used the domestic education they had acquired to establish small businesses, teach Cameroonian cuisine in schools, and seek professional development in other countries (101–2). Female politicians and education officers articulate how women's domestic work translates to nation building. The chapter evaluates how domestic sciences, which were meant to promote the private space of the home, also served to further women's public careers. For education and politics, Aunt Kate's Cookery Book published by Kate Idowu (107) speaks to the way gender ideals should be constructed for womanhood, health, family life, and national development.

Chapter Four debunks the narrative that beauty queens perform no valuable function. As part of maintaining their Anglophone cultural identity, west Cameroonian women used beauty pageants to perform nationalism (123). Between the 1960s and 1970s, beauty contests became a form of social and civic activity and were mainstreamed into officialdom, as featured in Miss British Week 1968 (155). Public respectability as a form of nationalism was adopted by educated women, using beauty pageants as a form of expression (159). Chapter Five explains how the social behavior of gossiping is peculiar to the everyday lives of women. Gossip was considered a feminized plague which tends to expose secrets. Educated women were encouraged to channel their interests toward the advancement of women's organizations. Gossips were censured and condemned as women's use of time was moralized. Gossip was considered inimical to the ideal concept of home and society (175.)

Chapter Six highlights the phrase "women extremists" to depict how educated urban elite women shunned cultural gendered norms to redefine new directions for women (178). These women were considered wicked and extreme because they challenged male authority. Marital relations were part of the political project to make Anglophone women distinct from Francophone women, given the fact the latter were considered to represent a lower standard (181). The concerns about this were expressed in three letters published in the *Cameroon Observer* of 1963, questioning which is more useful, literate or illiterate wives (183).

Chapter Seven considers how Cameroonian Christian ideals expect women to respect male authority through their mode of dress (199). Wearing pants signaled disrespect for patriarchal authoritative figures, including priests. Some letters called on educated women to model better fashion choices and to visibly embody suitable gendered behavior for women (199). Urban elite women regulate their dress choice and behavior (223). Women also had a prominent role in the Anglophone nationalist movement in 1992, as female bodies were used to protest against the arrest of Fru Ndi in Takumbeng (229). The author offers examples of the continuities and variations in the nationalist posture of Takumbeng women as it manifested in their generational and international re-emergence in 2017, in protests in the US, Canada, UK, Germany, and South Africa (229). The generational

realities vary, as younger women appear in white clothes. Mougoué's emphasis on continuities and variations in the nationalist posture of Anglophone Cameroonian women is a phenomenon peculiar to other societies in West Africa as well as Cameroon.

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